



# The Muse COMMANDS

How to Draw: first principle

True Painting and Imitation

HARALD MARKRAM

A Painter's Aims and philosophy

MARCO ANDREACCHIO

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Learning to Paint

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'Contemporary Music' ?

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# Preface

Issue #2! Ventures like 'The Muse Commands', begun with high hopes and fanfare, often fail. With glad caution, therefore, I begin this second issue in what we hope will be a continuing project.

The contents must speak for themselves. I will here address, however, a point which may, in these pages, cause confusion. Generally speaking, in my determinedly practical approach to painting, I use the terms 'classical' and 'modern' in specific ways. Vocabulary is not an absolute and part of education is learning to cope with that. Marco Andreacchio, whose radical views I fundamentally share, makes a distinction in his essay between 'classical' and 'modern' painting. What he means is implicit in his writing. He refers also to the classical/modern distinction as 'true painting' and its opposite. These terms, as Marco uses them, might be very roughly said to indicate the periods approximately before and after some moment in the 17th or 18th centuries. However, even if this might hold true in various specific cases more or less, Marco's definition is neither temporal nor historical. He is evoking a fundamental distinction which transcends time.

I, on the other hand, use the term 'true painting', which I inherit from certain 19th century French artists and theorists, to mean awareness, and correct use, and combination of the so called 'decorative' and 'illustrative' aspects of painting, as those theorists understood these terms. Further, I use the word 'modern', as I learned in my childhood, in two ways. The older way distinguishes all painting starting with Giotto in particular but also other painters such as Cimabue and Masaccio. This use is prior to the appearance of the term 'modernism' in the 20th century. 'Modernism', as I use it, usually refers to painting 'movements' begun in the 19th century.

For 'modernism', 'modern' painting begins not with Giotto but with what I call the 'early modernists'—Puvis de Chavannes and Manet for example. For 20th century theorists such painters are heroes of 'modernism'. But it is obvious to me that they were, to speak with precision, 'reactionary' in that they based their work not on some kind of progressive or future oriented idea but on painting practices of the past, namely those of Poussin and Velasquez respectively.

This is confusing. I therefore make careful distinctions within modernism. I call painters such as Puvis "early modernist". Then comes "2d wave" and "3d wave" modernism; these are radicalizations of the 'early modernist' approach on the basis of the early modernist theory of 'true painting'. Specifically the 2d and 3d wave painters put greater and greater emphasis on the decorative aspect. For the '2d wave', this means 'abstraction' in the sense of 'abstracting from' (i.e. post-impressionism: cubism, fauvism, expressionism). For the "3d wave" it means 'abstraction' understood as non-objective (i.e. abstract expressionism, minimalism, but dada and surrealism must be considered outside my 'modernist' framing). The reason for this radicalization has nothing to do with painting but is a consequence of the ideological thinking of those days which affected painters as much as it did everyone else.

As for 'classical', I use this term to refer to greek and roman art

generally, as well as 'modern' (in the post-Giotto sense) styles such as 'neo-classical' painting, which dominated for several decades starting in the late 18th century. It can also be used to refer to a mood in painting, which might be qualified as 'arcadian', 'bucolic' or 'of quiet grandeur', and so on. Aspects of Harald Markram's work might, in this sense, be qualified as 'classical'. (PR)



Joachim Bayens, gouache portrait, P. Rhoads

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# How to Draw: Lesson #1

PAUL RHOADS

## Prologue

Drawing is the basis of Art.

By "Art" I mean painting. Because when people say "Art" the first thing most think of is still painting. Likewise when we hear the word "culture", generally the first thought is "art". So "culture", first of all means "painting", and drawing is the basis of painting. Drawing is also basic to sculpture, architecture, design of all types and etc, so drawing, I say, is the basis of Art.

Why does painting have such a particular place in the idea of Art?

Art, in its essence, is poetry. By "poetry" I do not mean rhymed verse but poetic reaction, poetic expression. To understand what, in this sense, "poetry" is, contrast it with some non-poetic feeling and expression. For example: the feeling which emanates from, the expression embodied in, say, international corporations like McDonalds, Nike or Tesla. The synthetic joy, the appeals to petty gestures of social status and crypto couch-potatoism or luxury ecological virtue signaling: the hypocritical hucksterism underneath it all is invisible only to unpoetic spirits for whom such suave or agitated nihilism fills an empty space poetry should occupy. Or the numbing drudgery of office work, the efforts required to pass entrance or diploma exams, the routine of food shopping, coping with the maintenance and bureaucracy of car ownership — there are infinite examples of activities which require time, effort and attention but are non-poetic.

Some things, however, must be poetic: an evening out with a lover on a restaurant terrace overlooking the sea; without some poetry, however superficial, this situation fails. But 'Art', with a capital 'A', involves a deeper and more surprising kind of poetry, the kind that turns the banal, even the ugly, into a wonderful dream, an inspiration, food for the soul.

Why does painting hold such a particular place in the vocabulary related to "art"? Why not music or dance, which invades us and carries us into the moment with living gesture? Why not sculpture whose poetic forms are actually three dimensional? Why not writing which invades our minds and souls with ideas in the captivating language of words? The reason is that painting, in one way or another, manages to do so many of these things: it is living gesture made eternal, three dimensional form (as illusion) and idea as (visual) example. Furthermore it does not invade us, nor does it, like reading, hold itself back: it neither tyrannizes our attention like music nor impose temporal impositions like reading. Rather it is always and instantly available, to the mind's eye if not to the eye itself.

I do not mean to propose a hierarchy of the Arts with painting at the top. Each Art has its particular and necessary place in a world where different people have different powers and inclinations. Music appeals to the ears. Dance appeals to our frames.

Reading appeals to our minds. Wine making and cooking appeal to nose and tongue. Sculpture and painting appeal to the eyes. But as humans we are all these things, and the arts associated with each are aspects of our life. The point is not hierarchy, or that the eyes and visual experience are somehow higher or more important; I am only trying to explain the peculiar relationship of painting to the words "Art" and "culture".

Very well then, the art "painting" has some kind of special relation to "Art". But painting is not anything, as the neo-dadist post-moderns pretend. It is a particular art. This art consists, as Poussin famously said, of "pictures of everything under the sun,



made with lines and colors on a flat surface".

The question for us today is: this art, which is the representation of everything under the sun — meaning anything we can "see", including with the mind's eye — with lines and colors on a surface, how is it practiced?

Or, we could come at this problem from another angle: why, despite all the painting going on today, despite all the representations of stuff (including "non objective" stuff we are nonetheless seeing) are some of us convinced painting is a lost art? Despite the representational or illusionist brio of the new realists, or the abstractionist and surrealist enthusiasms of post-modernist conservatives — I refer to persistence in attitudes and styles which arose



from the progressivist enthusiasm of the 20th century and which since 1989 can clearly be seen for what they are (i.e. more or less sterile experiments) — why is it so clear we fall short of the old masters, from Giotto to Manet, from Duccio to Renoir? What are the missing ingredients, skills, perspectives, theories, practices or materials? What is it we no longer know?

After a lifetime wrestling with this question from both practical and theoretical angles, I pretend to understand it; so if the examples of my drawing which adorn, or disgrace, this essays do not suggest that my pretension might be justified, I cordially invite the reader to waste not a further instant on this exposé.

What follows is in the nature of a 'how to'. How to paint? How, above all, to draw. Drawing was always considered the heart of a painters education. This idea persisted into the 20th century, as exemplified by Hans Hoffmann, himself a student of Matisse, who was the teacher of the abstract expressionists. Drawing is the essence of painting.

Herbert Katsman (1923–2004) once said to me that drawing was "about color". It took me time to understand this, and doing so completed my understanding of why drawing is the essence of painting or, to put it another way, why drawing is already painting.

## Some Remarks on Drawing

Drawing has the ingratiating quality of being as much an activity for children as a high art. In the same way; everybody can sing but some people are trained opera singers. The present state of society makes the following remark necessary: drawing, in the higher sense, that which we associate with the old masters, involves more than tracing lines or representing things more or less symbolically, or even, at a higher level, of convincing illusionism. It is not an art that can be practiced at anything approaching the level of the old masters without training by even the most exceptionally gifted. Raphael, Rembrandt, Watteau and Ingres, to mention only these four among the greatest draftsmen, all benefited from instruction; the history of their education and artistic development is even a matter of historical record. In what, during so many centuries, did drawing instruction consist which produced such painters?

To put it another way: in what is our present drawing instruction — to the extent it can be said to exist — lacking? This, as Leo Strauss would say, is 'a long question'. I will here insist only on the single and most foundational aspect, without which even those crucial aspects which must follow cannot lead on to the sort of result we seek. What is this foundational aspect, so utterly unknown and neglected today, yet so evident and obvious in times past that barely any mention of it is made in the scant teaching literature which the old masters and their circles left to us?

When painting thrived in society, when poetic decoration, heroic commemoration, sentimental recollection, honorific memorial, were tasks calling for the painter's skill, master painters trained helpers to keep pace with demand, and these apprentices became the masters of the following generation. Art education (painting



Copy of Ingres by P. Rhoads, 1980

training), then was not a matter of theoretical readings and graduated exercise in a program, but a practical business. Young talent was trained and exploited for and through the realization of actual masterpieces; masterpieces for which there was a flourishing market. The apprentice, to be worth the master's time, had to quickly make himself useful, and the master had every motivation to assure this usefulness without delay.\* In other cases masters offered training to students who paid to learn the secrets of the craft.

Painting education, prior to its collapse, was informal and practical. The tricks of the trade were valuable knowledge the broadcast of which was not in the interest of those who lived by them. The absence of theoretical and methodical catalogues of principles and means is therefore not surprising.

Today the situation is dramatically different. More money chases what is fraudulently accepted and maintained as "art" than ever blessed the profession in the whole glorious period of its previous existence. Meanwhile anything that might without utter shame legitimately pretend to the designation is officially seen as irrelevant if not morally degenerate, and is excluded from this newfangled 'economy'. The secrets of painting, therefore, are now as valueless as their result, so it is no economic sacrifice for me to teach these

\*The earliest 'schooling' of future masters of painting began with the French academy in the 18th century. This development eventually contributed to the collapse of painting a century later but that story lies outside the present exposition. We may note, however, that Fragonard and Hubert Robert were subjected to nascent academic methods without ruin, though they also benefited from traditional formation which seems to have been how they were effectively trained.



matters openly, as much as it is my duty to painting to do what I can restore its existence by graciously helping young painters learn that without which their efforts are unlikely to surpass the amateurish levels to which the most assiduous efforts of recent generations have managed to rise.

Very well, enough rhetorical flourishes and side issues! What is this wonderful, foundational and secret information? But here again I hesitate, for there is a yet another reason which makes discussion of this matter problematic, even today . . . today more than ever! Previously painting was taught in a practical manner, by example in the context of actual work, because painting *is* a practical matter. Talk, theoretical considerations, may be interesting or even helpful in some ways but they cannot replace actual practice, actual putting down of lines and colors on a surface, a surface of particular qualities using paints of particular characteristics, to represent a particular subject in a particular context. So, I will now proceed to teach theory but I expect to only begin to be understood by actual practitioners butting up against the problems I will invoke, because my theoretical exposition can never replace a practical demonstration. Such a demonstration must go beyond the possibilities of video because the proper teacher-student interaction depends on the aptitude, level and needs of a particular student, as well as a moment to moment, gesture by gesture, supervision.

## The First Principle

The missing element, the foundational block I wish to address, is concern with composition. I spent half a life time puzzling over the question 'what is composition?' Today I pretend to a certain understanding of this most basic of painting matters. I can say without peroration that it has nothing to do with "harmony and balance" or other such platitudes which have replaced the practical knowledge of the old masters. It has everything to do with 'true painting', theorized by the early modernists as Arthur Dow reports in his books. To state this most basic compositional principle as bluntly as possible, it is: 'concern with the page'.

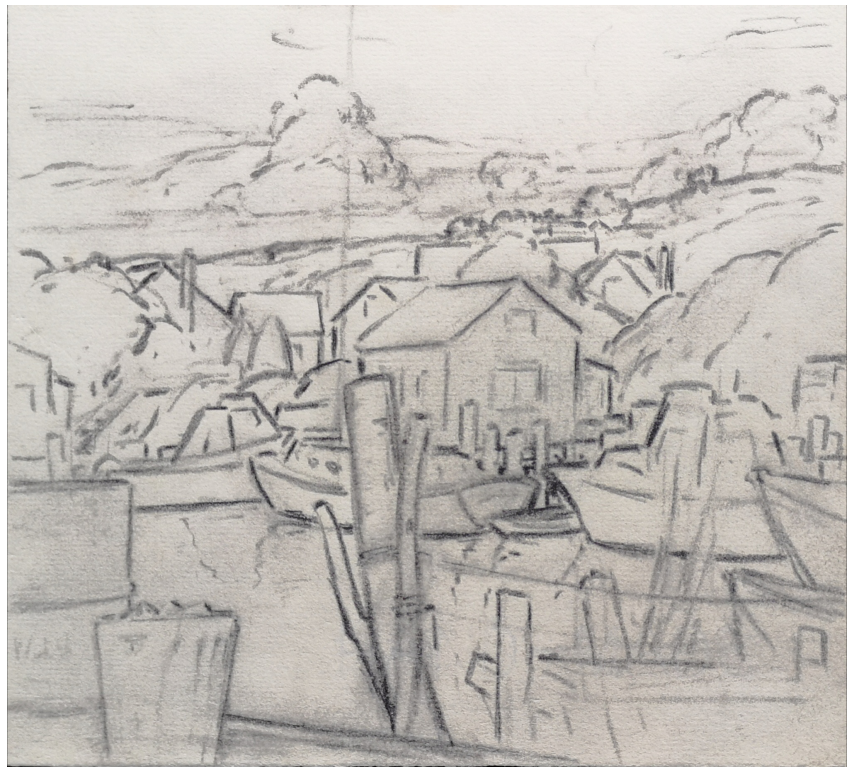
I'll state this another way: when drawing a subject, figure or landscape, your first concern ought not to be that subject but the page on which you are going to draw it. A subject is not a target to be duplicated. It is not the most important thing. The page or canvas itself is the first object of the draftsman's or true painter's attention. A painting (thus a drawing) is a picture of anything under the sun made with lines and colors on a flat surface. It is "a picture". It is not a reproduction, a *remaking* of a thing; it is a thing *made* on a surface



with lines and colors.

A drawing is a way of talking about something in a language, the language of drawing, which is properly a form of poetry, a mode of expression. Indeed, that a few lines, scrawled with apparent negligence, could 'say' so much; is this not magical? Given that I am, we might say, a low level magician initiated in the arcana of such enchantments, you would be well advised to take it from me that the expressive power of a few 'negligent' lines does not arise most directly from the lines themselves but, first of all, from the relation of those lines to the page. You would be well advised to believe and try to understand this though I doubt many will try even as I ponder ways to make this understanding more accessible.

You might draw a portrait of your girl friend. She might then die. In any case, tanned and untanned, fatter and thinner, coiffed and uncoiffed, older and younger, dressed and undressed, she was





always changing and after death she does not even exist. To put this another way, a drawing of a person says something about the person but *is not* the person. What is it? It is not a mechanical impression of light reflected off her, like a photograph. It is, very exactly and first of all: 'a piece of paper with marks on it'. But which is more fundamental: the marks or the paper? Could the marks exist without the paper?

A drawing is a piece of paper with marks made upon it. It is a decorated piece of paper. The marks decorate the paper, not the contrary. The marks are embodied symbols. That embodiment is made possible by the ground, the support: the page. The language of drawing, to exploit this metaphor, is phrases realized as a modification of a page. A drawing is a modified page.

By page, however, it must be understood that I am not referring to a theoretical surface, a 'ground' of theoretically infinite extension, but to a specific piece of paper, or canvas, the most important characteristic of which is its extent, its concrete physicality. The page is an object the boundaries of which are, so to say, the rhythmic structure and rhyme pattern of the poem, the expression that will be our drawing.

This understanding, I say, is the most fundamental understanding of composition, and therefore the most fundamental aspect of drawing and painting. But as unspoken, as hidden behind the secret praxis of the old masters as it may be, there exist even today indications of how it used to be discussed and overtly taught. If you go to art school in certain eastern European countries, certain academies set up in the 18th and 19th century, in imitation of the French academy, and despite the ravages of communism and post-communist oligarchic degeneracy, continue to teach some of the principles initially learned from their french masters.

The French school, let us recall, begins with the artists imported from Italy by François Ier to decorate Fontainebleau, notably Rosso and Primaticcio, themselves students of Michelangelo. This base was most significantly enriched by Poussin's enthusiasm for the "Roman school"; the approach to painting stemming from Raphael, and what might be called a Flemish or northern enrichment from Watteau (which in is essentially a "venetian" influence, but such remarks require a long development). The remnants of the



old teaching still extant in eastern Europe are, therefore, faint echoes of what used to be called The Great Tradition, which was an amalgam of the Roman and Venetian schools (or 'disegno' and 'colore').

If you study life drawing in some of these east European or Russian schools you will be instructed to "fill the page" with the figure. So, while the figure must be properly proportioned in relation to itself, it must also be as big in the page as possible, or the page must be exploited fully. In such classes, no matter how well

your figure is 'drawn', it will be unacceptable if it doesn't fill the page.

Let me emphasize this to make sure it is well understood: in such classes you can make the most beautiful rendering of a figure ever made in all human experience but, if it fails to correctly fill the page, the teacher will demand it be erased and redone with, as most important criteria, correct relation to the page. In the case of such life drawing exercises this means, very simply, being as large as possible in the page.

My own teacher, Aaron Kurzen, who had studied with Cameron Booth, who had himself studied in France after the first world war with André Lhote and Hans Hoffmann but also in 'academic' classes, insisted on this stricture in his life class, which I was privileged to spend years attending, and later even to teach in the roll of assistant. I did not encounter it with any other drawing teachers, who included Mercedes Matter and other Hoffmann students.

Students of illustration are not confronted with this. They must correctly render; that is all. They also learn some principles of design which should include a certain awareness of the page in order, in advertising, to make an impact, to call attention, while in narrative illustration it might emphasize an explanatory aspect; for example that all the parts of the illustration should contribute to the narrative message. In comics the page must be taken into account for industrial reasons, while each cell is a matter of narrative illustration. These minor arts (illustration, comics, etc.) do not include the poetic exigency of what used to be called "fine art". So called "illustration", to the extent the term ever meant anything, was simply the same thing designated by "fine art" but in the service of less poetic aims. For example,





fashion drawing was based less on observation, understanding and poetic expression than conventions corresponding to popular stereotypes of leg and neck length, body type as well as conventional way of representing cloth, hair and etc.. Mastery of such conventions is not nothing — if my remarks are taken as derogatory or condescending I am failing to make myself understood — but

neither is it a properly poetic expression, for the very reason that it is so much based on convention.

All this does not mean that fashion drawing, comics or 'illustration' can't be poetic, only that, generally speaking, and particularly regarding education towards these categories of drawing, an exigency of poetry is not emphasized. I do not mean that education aimed at "fine art" is somehow "poetic" in intent or substance, but that there is a difference between learning to use a language and learning a set of stock phrases in order to accomplish a narrow task. Since poetry depends on expression, the more expressive you can be the more poetic you can be, because poetry is what we mean when we refer to something as "highly expressive". Leaving aside any refinement of the term "highly expressive", I am trying to point out that drawing is a language and language is for expression. The aim of drawing training, in the highest case, is expressiveness or, very simply stated: saying much with little, because the more you can put into a mark, just as the more you can put into a word or a phrase, the more expressive it can be. Drawing education, then, is about understanding and mastering the elements of drawing that contribute to expression. The most basic of these, I say, is awareness of the page.

Filling the page with the figure is not, in itself, either awareness of the page, or expressive as such. However it is a useful exercise in that it forces the student to become aware of the page at least to the extent that conceiving a correctly proportioned figure, correctly sized for the page, is a double constraint which forces at least as much concentration on the page as on the figure. Almost no drawing teacher or student today has the idea that emphasis on the page is related to "drawing". They are concerned only with rendering the subject, or such tertiary concerns as using ink rather than charcoal.



Watteau

The transcendent importance of the page is related to the transcendent importance of composition. A painting is not simply a painting of a thing, it is a thing in itself. When we look at paintings we are not judging them against their subjects to see how well the subject is represented. In most cases the subjects don't even exist. For example 'The Resurrection', to say nothing of still lifes or landscapes made in the 17th century or portraits of people long dead. A painting is, first of all, a composition, which is to say: a set of lines and colors which represents something but which, to begin with, are simply a set of lines and colors arranged on a page. You can have lines and colors without a subject, just as you can have

a page without a drawing. The fundamental element of artistic expression is the page, that which is potentially an expressive vehicle. The decorated page *is* the drawing.

The director arranges the actors on the stage in such a way that, from the point of view of the audience, the scene tells its story. Scenography is a form of composition. The scenographer, the director, is not concerned with making the action understood, legible, comprehended, from the wings or from behind the stage, but from the audience's point of view. The action does not exist in itself; it must be presented within the proscenium, oriented towards the audience. If it is not presented well, if the space as seen by the audience is not used intelligently, if the relation of the drama and action to the space is not effective, expression is compromised.

An aspect of composition, and thus of drawing in its 'fine art' sense, is quantities of various sorts. For example, there is the relation of dark areas to light areas, not just their position, but simply their quantity. In the absence of a defined area, a page, a rhyme

and rhythmic structure, this expressive aspect does not come into play. Without the proscenium, without the page as such, quantities have no meaning because there is no "quantity" without measure. The page is the measure: a quantity is a fraction of the page.

Directions (predominance of diagonal or vertical movements for example) are another quality which loses coherence in an unbounded situation or, more specifically, a drawing where the page, where the boundaries, where the underlying structure of the expression, is not taken into account, even if the draftsman is using — as is generally the case — a bounded ground. The page does not force the draftsman to take it into account, the draftsman must do





so deliberately.

If we think, again, of the page as a poetic structure — like the x number of lines and y rhythmic structure and z rhyme scheme of such and such a poetic frame — if, I say, we conceive the shape (proportions) and size of the page as the fundamental form, we can begin to perceive how the natural forces or energies of those proportions and that size must in the first place be harnessed to our expressive intent. For example, the longest line, the greatest distance which can exist on a rectangular page, is that which runs from corner to corner across the page. No line, no movement, can be longer in that context. But we may dream of suggesting a vast movement, a ship crossing the seas, a great blow struck upon an anvil. Our very limited formal situation must be mobilized to the expression of something perhaps infinitely more expansive. Here again the page is our most basic expressive tool.

It may be objected that draftsmen such as Watteau often drew vignettes, for example heads here and there on the page. But it is not for beginners to uncomprehendingly imitate merely apparent aspects of the work of such a master. In the first place Watteau rarely does not decorate his pages, which he fills in various ways. He began his education, after all, as a decorator! Watteau reportedly composed his paintings by adding figures from his sketch books into his landscapes. But this does not tell the whole story; specifically it cannot explain the intimate processes and silent choices behind what appeared to an observer as a somewhat haphazard process of collage. Watteau's great follower, Boucher, apparently used a more synthetic process where figures seem to arise from pre-established geometrical structures. But again, we are not privy to those intimate processes and secret choices leading to a result the ultimate springs of which may remain hidden to our understanding. What can be said is that, in both cases the end result is 'composition' of the highest order, or as related to the page as any dramatic action could be to a proscenium.



There are, of course, many other masters than Watteau and Boucher. They have been of special use to me personally but they are not the only masters who have fascinated me and from whom I have benefited. I mention this to emphasize that what I am struggling to teach has nothing to do with style. I regard style as an inevitable concomitant of our limitations or, more exactly, a

symptom of our weakness. Inevitably anything done takes a specific form the exact nature of which is both the culmination of our efforts as well as the specific and limited trace we leave upon the infinite, the ultimate reality which we can never hope to encompass or express but only yearn for and invoke. The corollary of this thought: the inanity of preoccupation with historical styles, in the form of fear or longing, cannot be developed here, beyond saying that I regard such fears and longings with indulgent contempt. Our work as painters is to master our art, not to second guess Time and Destiny.





# True Painting and the Problem of Imitation

MARCO ANTONIO ANDREACCHIO

There is a categorical rift between classical and modern painting, for modern painting as such ceases to be "imitation of nature" (in the classical sense of the expression, by splitting mechanically two complementary poles: our feeling (or "subjective experience") of things and the ("objective") concept we forge of things. A "historical dialectic" unfolds out of these two poles, corresponding to the modern value-vs-fact distinction.

With respect to the origin or proper nature of painting — thus to what painting is in and of itself — modern painting cannot

painter follows in nature's footsteps, accessing nature's own way. He does not consider nature from any "viewpoint," if not entirely accidentally. He ceases to approach nature in a vulgar manner, or as ordinary non-painters do.

Becoming a painter — a true painter — involves a perceptive conversion whereby we cease looking at our model from without it, by way of giving or exposing ourselves entirely to it, so that it may live within us. There is, in this respect, no activity that is more "compassionate" than painting. For the painter must let his model live in him.

This is not to say that the painter is to reduce the alterity of the model to himself, but that he must die to the model, allowing the model — its movement and character (way and manner) — to "possess" him, to speak in him. All the painter achieves is, properly speaking, the work of the dead, an otherworldly work involving the exposure of nature to its eternal fulfillment. In other words, the painter is to seek the truth or original meaning of nature.

Now, in the modern world, the essential telos or "way" of the painter is obscured in the name of manifesting the hidden and of discovering truth as the final synthesis of the beginning (nature) and its discovery (historical man). Old paintings are replaced by images that, strictly speaking, don't mean anything. Their meaning being defined by their viewers, the images belong to the sphere of advertisement, or propaganda. There is no question of relating physical nature to divine/divined, hidden nature, or the profane to the sacred. For now the profane has been raised to the status of the sacred rendering old painting anachronistic at best, or else outright blasphemous. Why, today it would appear preposterous for painting to consciously reject the new imperative to incorporate the sacred in the profane through an effort at unqualified, uncompromising divulgation — the rendering-vulgar of holiness, the reduction of spontaneity to pressing compulsion. Divulgation is supposed to overcome the aristocratic impulse of "mystics," just as the imitation of nature is to be construed as (mechanical) assimilation of nature in a machine, consummate form of all mechanical appropriation. But the machine that no longer presupposes a natural, permanent support is what we call technology, the proper work of which consists in appropriating its natural support to produce a new one for itself, one onto which technology can be terminally "at home". For the new support is the Mecca in which technology can look at itself as God, creator of its own world.

The new creator can virtually create "directly from itself" or ex nihilo, insofar as it can pretend, within the sphere of its virtual world, to have overcome natural mediation. Nature is not overcome, however, but merely obscured vis-à-vis its transcendent dimension. In other words, nature's presence is acknowledged as that of mere fuel. Such is the concession that the new painter-as-advertiser is compelled to make as he attends to his designated enterprise, thereby replacing old contemplative painting with a new one dedicated to a "shock and awe" effect compensating for the death



Delight in Eden, M.A. Andreacchio, colored pencil on paper

but be an impostor. Painting as such ceases to be true where it is shut to the inherent or natural value of facts and thus where it rejects a natural hierarchy of ends. The painter who regards facts as devoid of natural value is an impostor. Classical painting is necessarily "imitation of nature" in the sense that it is not merely the (re)production of pleasing beauty, but the mirror of truth, which includes both the beautiful and the ugly, both pleasure and pain, both light and darkness (not as merely-visual, but primarily spiritual properties). The imitation of nature presupposes that nature is a model to look up to; that it has inherent value. The imitation is not merely "objective," or "extrinsic" and thus mechanical (ex machina): in imitating nature, the true or classical





of nature's hidden God.

Notwithstanding his posturing as absolute creator, the painter producing a work of art as *factum brutum* ("raw fact") devoid of inherent value imitates a certain notion of nature as *soulless res extensa*. The violence of a nature constrained within the laboratory of modern History is mirrored in the violence of a new painting shutting the door to all thoughts of transcendence. The new painting is supposed to confirm the irrelevance of metaphysical questions for ethics, or the erasure of dialogue between the divine and the human. Instead of serving as a window to the Beyond, the new painting stands as a Wall justifying a life shut to any Beyond. The new painting is then conveying a salient message: freedom can truly thrive only upon the death of God—of the living or dangerous God that questions all human certainties, and that is after all the First Question.

How does the modern reading of freedom inform the "training" of the painter? The painter no longer looks upon "old masters" as models to emulate, but as material to use on the way to creating the New in a world of News. Only what is eminently new deserves a place in our New World, the order devoted to the new as a present-beyond-past, a present escaping from all relapse into the past by no longer receiving the future as gift, but building it through continuous struggle, reconceiving the future as the product of the new present. The new present, then, goes hand in hand with a new future, while the past—the old, the receding—lingers as mere-danger justifying our flight from it.

What is "dangerous" about old masters? The delusion of otherworldliness, their "aristocratic spirit," their appeal to ends ostensibly irrelevant to our new world, our world of newness. The

old masters harken to the eternity that we, now, look down upon as a historically-determined obstacle to enlightenment, to emancipation, to our being-our-power, our being all that we can be. In order to be what we can be, in order for us to convert our being into outright power, we must be utterly disenchanted in the face of the problem of eternity. Eternity as "other" with respect to our existence cannot but be an illusion produced by those unintegrated in the flux (be it a march, a race, or a flight) of History. That flux is all that really counts, all that is "relevant," where "relevance" is all that really counts. Relevance to what? To the flux itself, to be sure; relevance to the apotheosis of the new, to the flux that escapes death in a present building its own future and that becomes the future, the future as truth about the present, creativity unbound.

What happens here to the notion of a historical ascent to the future, the notion of historical progress? Upon the liberation of the present from the mirage of eternity, or where the present "realizes" itself as the building of eternity as future, time no longer advances, but expands as space: it "colonizes," or appropriates Otherness as meaningless extension. The linear trajectory of History is replaced by the "circular" one of Geography. Historical time converts into mythical time, the horizon of a new imagination cut off from any "pre-historical" or metaphysical eternal being. There is no more historical time, today, insofar as "the today" merely replicates or reproduces itself by creating and entering into its own tomorrow. The "tomorrow" is then the mark of the expansion of the today, the perpetuation of the new, of News as consummate form of compulsion—a form nourished strictly by our compulsions, as these gather fatherless on our post-metaphysical landscape.

What has occurred here? The classical rootedness of artistic creation in natural generation has been overturned, whereby a new art is supposed to serve as the foundation of all generation (whereby a new spontaneity is established on the basis of cunning). The classical secret underpinning the distinction between nature and art is replaced, or rather eclipsed by a new synthesis of nature and art. This is the heart of the modern project: recreating nature as a function of art, generation on the basis of creativity (a new "post-metaphysical" one, to be sure).

Throughout the Middle Ages we are reminded of divine or primordial creation through an intellectual act in which eternal being transports itself entirely, so that creation is essentially intellectual, or ordered meaningfully as a determination signifying the absolute indetermination of eternal being. This is to say that "creatures" or created beings (*entia*) mean something in an innate sense; they are inherently or essentially meaningful. Now, in the modern context, the classical "Platonic" notion of created beings having an inherent meaning is rejected in favor of perspectivism, which is a doctrine or attitude on account of which meaning is always extrinsic or relative to an outside viewer. Meaning is supposed to arise a posteriori, as a "symbolic attribution" that allows us to make use of things. On this view, "things"—or the discrete content of our everyday life experience—are not originally created; instead, they are generated in a material or irreducibly-mediated manner. The physical universe simply "comes



into being”; it “emerges” or “evolves”. Where does this leave us, agents of moral and conceptual attributions? Man is supposed to be endowed (through material evolution) with the power to invent or create meaning as form in which matter can fit to serve our needs ad hoc, or in an expediential manner. We are supposed to survive or affirm our lineage by gathering physical motion into forms we create seemingly ex nihilo.

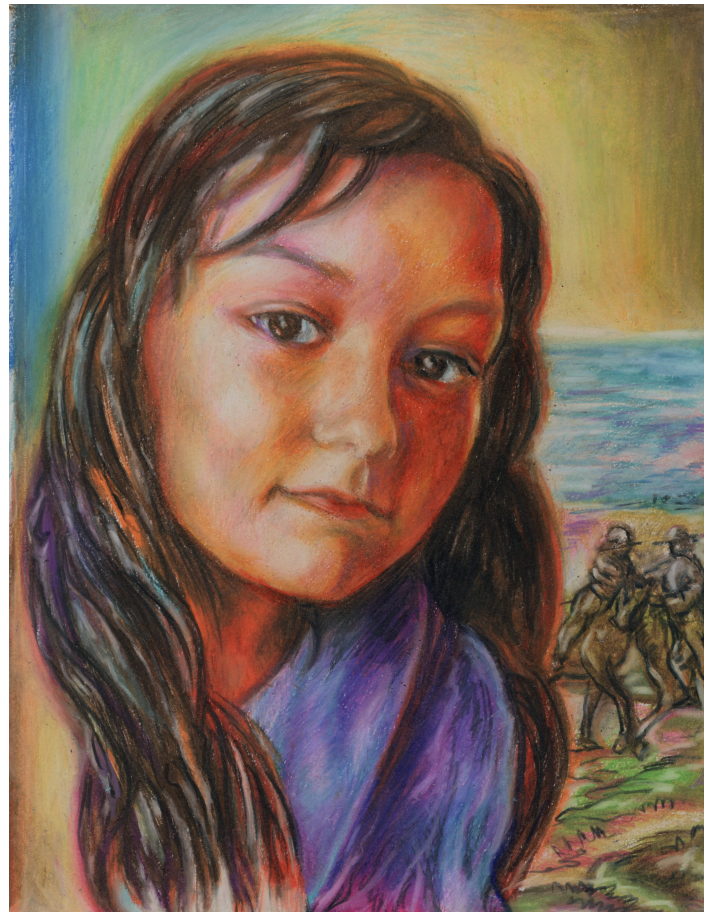
What we have here is a variant of Medieval nominalism, or the notion that words do not mean things themselves, in the respect that they are (supposed to be) merely free-floating attributions that help us cope with otherwise meaningless things. Modern nominalism “upgrades” its Medieval predecessor by supplementing it with the notion that our conceptual and moral attributions are not merely useful to cope with an effectively Godless world; those attributions can help us transport “matter” into the creation of a new world of symbolic “things,” where we can pretend that we are the creators of generation, insofar as we experience generation on a technical platform.

In the modern world of symbolic experience, we stand as guardians, guarantors, even saviors of nature, for we are supposed to be the creators of nature’s forms. These “symbolic forms” are supposed to give meaning to and in this sense “create” nature by defining matter’s identity; so what we now call nature comes to presuppose the forms we attribute to it ex machina, our goal being the transplanting of nature/matter onto the stage of human creativity, or the self-serving impulse by which we attribute meaning to otherwise meaningless things.

In our modern context, where painting is called upon to contribute to the transplanting of nature onto the stage of modern man’s symbolic creations, how can the painter offer his contribution? By reducing all image-production to mechanical procedures, relying, today, as much as possible on neo-Cartesian machines such as our computers. With the unfolding of the modern world, painters are to be gradually replaced entirely by computers and the digital networks falling under the category of “Artificial Intelligence” (A.I.): intelligence grounded, not in eternal being (as is the intellectual act generated by God, as per our pre-modern classics), but in unintelligible mechanical forces.

With A.I., intelligence is a superstructure *via-à-vis* sheer matter, just as consciousness is a façade for the unconscious. Free from all pre-modern concerns, A.I. is best positioned to replace old painters, carrying out the formidable task of organizing or formatting the material underpinnings of our experience into formal or digital structures that can replicate our experience abstracted from all obstacles to the terminal consolidation of a technocratic society, or a society that is virtually or symbolically perfectly autonomous or cleansed of metaphysical limitations. For the new “formal” society emerges to posture as its own metaphysical limit, or that above which there is no potentiality.

Falling short of engaging uncompromisingly in radical rebellion to the dictates of modernity, today’s painters are doomed. Any spiritual compromise would not merely compromise painting tangentially;



it would nail it to the path of its extinction, where the painter is replaced by a fundamentally unconscious computing machine. But where does “rebellion” begin? It cannot begin from painting, for prior to being painters we are men who are already “contextualized” or “framed” by modern discourse. Modern discourse, its very telos (orientation, articulation and end), is to be countered by a classical speech binding the sensory life, or feeling/sentiment, back to pure intellection, or the marriage of thing and intuition (*adæquatio rei et intellectus*, to cite a Medieval formula). We need to return to a conception of generation unmediated by human artifices and so a common sense or imagination unmediated by calculation. Unless the painter returns to a spontaneity presupposed by any and all human deliberation (choice determined a posteriori with respect to the ordinary arising of the contents of experience), he is condemned to allow his sentiment to be mediated/channeled by and fed into our technological Leviathan. Yet, spontaneity is unsustainable without proximate anchorage. Unless we recover a traditional anchorage in ancestral authority and a concomitant sense of gratitude towards our Fathers, we are fated to place our spontaneity in the service of cunning, letting it be manipulated to serve ends alien to it.

In sum, the return to emulation of ancient masters is a *sine qua non* for any successful resistance to the onslaught on painting, nay on humanity itself, carried out by the technological Regime. Yet again, successful emulation cannot be mechanical. We must emulate our Fathers, not merely from afar, but by engaging in intimate dialogue with them, by following in their footsteps, by living like them, not in the sense that we should pretend to be like them, but in the sense



that we must seek what they sought, reasoning as they reasoned. Their reason having become our own, as well, we will be freed from the fear repressing our natural inclinations, or our natural desire and the feelings constituting its outer shell. Now alone, will spontaneity flow undefiled towards its proper end or good, so that the flow will be rational without being unnatural.

The discrepancy between the sensory and the purely intellective is accounted for by and in a classical reasoning that was once called "poetic," as opposed to "scientific-instrumental". The poetic reason/discourse of pre-modernity (including "medieval antiquity") stands as proper mediator between the senses and pure intellection. The discrepancy between the two poles corresponds, as our medieval classics show systematically, to the categorical discrepancy between generation and creation. Intellection, we are taught, is born directly of eternal being, retaining its eternal indetermination, whereas physical creation is substantively altered with respect to eternal being; for physical being is determined. As such, it mirrors indefinite being as a sign signifying/signaling, as from another world. While the medieval Platonic doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* entails the emanation of divine or eternal indetermination into physical/temporal determinations, that emanation is intellective in the respect that it contains its creations as noetic determinations within itself. It is through its "intellective" or providential (from the Latin *pro-videre*) gathering of determinations into their origination, that divine being emanates determinate beings out of itself. It emanates them, not through (and/or into) a "matter" alien to itself, but through the intellective activity of intelligible forms constituting the veritable content of eternal being itself, or of the primordial sense of being (in this respect, the cradle/womb of creation is eternal being itself, as opposed to any "matter" external to it).

What is ultimately the case amounts to "forms of intelligibility," or "beings of pure intellection": beings strictly within pure thought or mind. Eternal being is actually present in physical beings through its intellective "voice," or in the divine's act of gathering the physical back into the purely noetic. Through, or rather as Intellect, divine eternal being creates forms that are necessarily open to full intelligibility, never being aside from or outside of intellection. The sensory stands at the margins of intellection, but never outside of it. To stand entirely outside of intellection is simply not to be, or to "fall" into utter negativity. Here we may speak of pure absence of being, or the permanent shadow of the eternal intellective agency of being, that is, of what the forms of things ultimately



Laughing Savage

or originally are.

Eternal being emanates into physical determinations intelligibly, or in the act of making sense of them, of defining them vis-à-vis noetic indetermination, as signs of their original perfection. What mediates the signs and their referent is the intellective/gathering act in virtue of which creation is direct (unmediated) while retaining independence from its source. How is this possible?



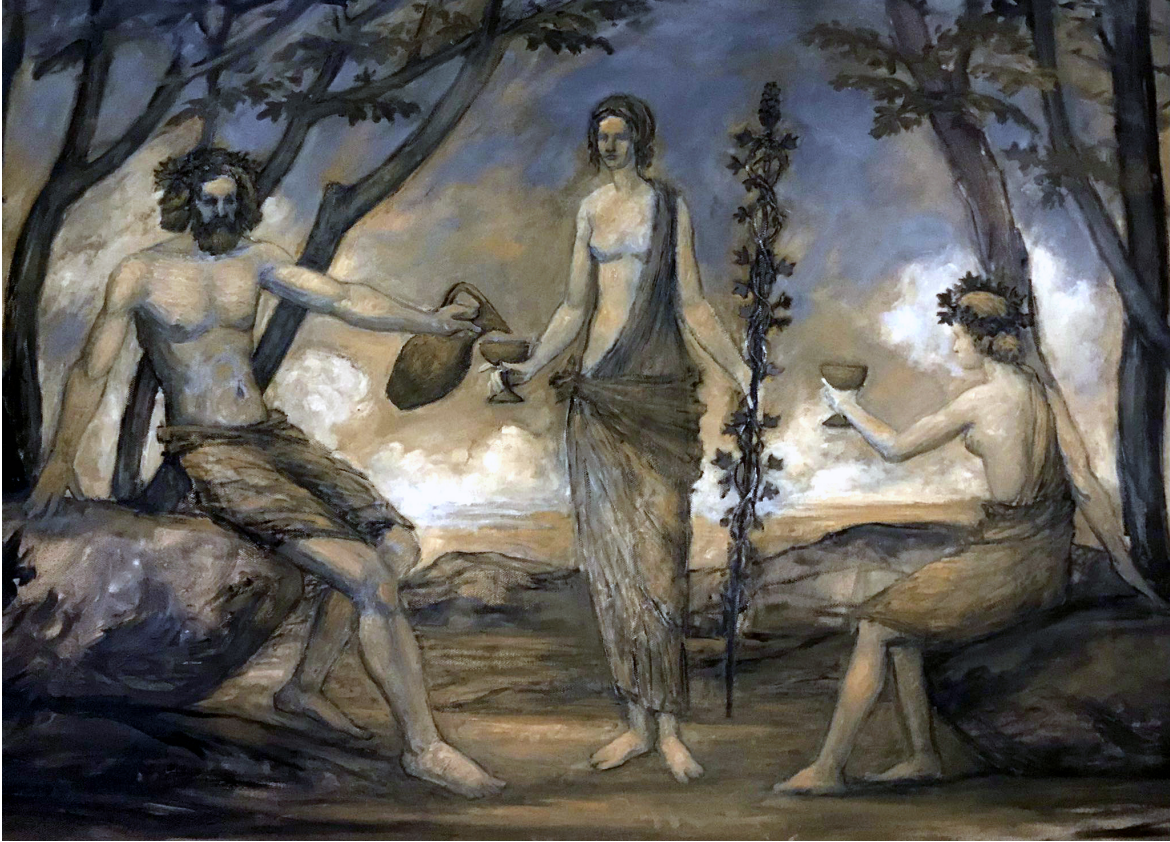
Leap of Betrayal

While the created is other with respect to the creator, the latter determines itself in the physical as a spark or occasion of intellection — a "motivation" to return to itself.

True painting relates to the physical as divine "motivation" to rise back to the divine itself. In the context of the painter's ascent to the divine as proper cradle of beings, the painter "trains" in bearing witness to the truth about external forms. Forms are not truly merely "external" or "objective," but "in God," which is to say that they are primordially or radically intelligible, or open to question. To rise from "opaque" forms to forms transparent to consciousness, this is the essence of painting. Aside from that essence, the painter's training remains a vain pretense.



# My Aims and Philosophy



## HARALD MARKRAM

Beauty is an eternal pattern inherent to the structure of Creation. My only aim in painting is to achieve it, so as to exalt the mind and spirit of the viewer to the Glory of God. Though painting by its most basic definition can be used for purposes other than this, any other purpose would be at best to fall short of the highest possibility, at worst a deliberate debasement. The subject of the painting only matters insofar as it can be treated in a way that achieves this end: a painting of an apple, a murder, a pagan scene, can all potentially serve to direct the viewer back to God through His transcendent quality of Beauty. It is my opinion that a work of art should encourage that which tends to life and generation. This is not to say that there should be no acknowledgment of evil, or violence and severity in their proper place, but that such qualities be tempered with those of peace and joy, ultimately to serve as a reminder of where we come from and where we are going despite our current fallen state. This idea extends







from the very way the lines are drawn to the subject of the painting itself. One should avoid being too specific in the illustrative subject, giving precedence to the poetic quality and harmonious structure of the overarching compositional idea.

## Education and development

I remember my first interaction with Painting. Around the age of 3 my mother took me to the museum. A little annoyed and overwhelmed by the bustling crowd, I hid my face in her shoulder as she held me and fell asleep. I woke up to her voice urging me to look. I looked, and before us was what I would guess now was a little 18th century French painting of a lady reclining in a landscape. Struck by its otherworldly grace, I immediately felt transported. The painting seemed composed of a fiery light from a higher realm. Looking back, I might say that all my efforts have been to recreate whatever this painting had. Perhaps because of this experience, or a natural inclination that allowed it in the first place, I have always had an appreciation for painting. Really, to say appreciation isn't strong enough — it has always seemed to





me the most wonderful thing in the world! I always drew and was known for it, and had a certain natural ability, but didn't take it very seriously or make anything of note until about the age of 16. Around this time I made my first oil painting, a plein air sketch from the shore of the Ohio River on a glorious summer evening. It was then I truly feel, one might say, that I made contact with the Muse or achieved a true feeling for the act of painting, and knew that I could never care to do anything else. That isn't to say I haven't had my struggles . . . to this day I abandon or destroy 9 out of 10 attempts! I sought formal training, and attended an atelier school where I copied Bargue plates and drew from the model. The benefits and drawbacks of this type of training can be discussed elsewhere. In short, I certainly learned a lot, notably endurance that all it takes to bring a drawing to perfect finish (given you know what to pay attention to) is to correct mistakes again and again, even over weeks, months, and years. It struck me during an exhibition of Old Master drawings that perfect finish and modeling are not entirely what drawing is about, not even the most important aspect. The drawings at this exhibition were of a completely different quality to those at the atelier! These were not entirely naturalistic, and certainly not labored over, but simple and idealized towards the highest beauty. The focus was not on illustration but on using the interaction of light and dark to define a poetic idea within a compositional structure. These drawings felt imbued with vitality and joy, like utterances directly from the mind of nature, saying something that can only be said through drawing. I left the



atelier after a few months, forced into a hiatus from painting in order to provide for the necessities of life . . . in other words, I had to get a job! I would draw here and there, doing sketches for compositions in the hope that I could eventually develop them into paintings. After a few years of this I got into a car crash in which I violently rolled down a hill, where I found myself very surprised to be alive and completely unharmed. Walking over the







hills along the highway among the stunted oak trees at sunrise, I was filled again with the unignorable drive to paint! Reminded that I could die at any moment, I took it as a sign to not go into work and devote myself entirely to painting. I began work on one of my compositions, the scene of the Annunciation to the Shepherds. While working on this painting I ran into certain problems that reminded me of an exercise I heard about years before in a video by Paul Rhoads, called the black and white composition exercise in which you paint using only black and white without regard to an illustrative subject at all, only to cover the page with a harmonious interaction between a dark shape and a light shape. I didn't actually

do the exercise, but tried to conceive of the painting as if I were doing this exercise for a time. I started watching Paul's videos again and discovered the invitation to his Composition Club server. This has been a great blessing and perhaps the most important part of my artistic education. Through back and forth with Paul and others in the server I am learning where my weaknesses lie, most importantly regarding the mysterious subject of Composition . . . how to arrange the forms and values in the best possible way for the idea. And so, that is where I am now . . . Mainly working in charcoal in order to really learn to conceive of things in terms of composition.



# Six Poems by Chris Johns

Acrylic is to oil,  
As nylon is to cotton.

And what other analogies  
Lie in wait,  
Ready

To pounce?

Perhaps pounce  
is a kind of blooming,

As if a flower were  
A predator,

And sunlight  
Its prey.

If Weiss & Bach had conducted the world,  
And its societies of speech,  
I doubt that it would have murmured  
Against so refined a harmonic reach.

Instead all things would praise,  
Even in their complaints,  
If those may beautifully suggest  
Their creator's sweet restraint.

Paint is a happy substance  
That goes almost anywhere,  
That colors its path its own hue  
Bled by paintbrush hair.

If that blood be blood of blue,  
To paint a sky without a cloud,  
Perhaps a cloudless day will do,  
Made of simple blue.

But if other paints arrive,  
To disturb so vast a scene,  
A blue sky won't be left alive  
where other paints have been.

But the commanding eye is jealous,  
And where more paint could sky destroy,  
Guards things in their gentleness  
And delicate mood of joy.

You are a muted tv in an empty room,  
full of rapid edits,  
Emitting a weak erotic charge,  
Less a mannequin than a dummy.

My blood is stale.  
Vampires would refuse it.  
And my brain floats upside down  
like a dead fish in my skull.

You used to seem futuristic  
But I, must have been, autistic.



Upon Christ's return,  
 All of the paintings  
 In all of the museums  
 Of the world  
 Became wet again

So he could touch a few up  
 And destroy a few others

By smearing them blank  
 And starting from scratch

But it was only after  
 A long time  
 That people noticed  
 He had left several alone

Not even adding his signature

And this was considered  
 In the councils

The glorious councils

Where Christ commented  
 Not a jot

So they were hung  
 Where they will hang

And no one can remove them

Even with pliers  
 And piano wire

On a particularly gay morning  
 A friend of mine greeted me on the street  
 While I was unawares.  
 He hinted at a certain delicate matter  
 That should have been resolved long ago  
 And yet still had, for me, an immediacy  
 Like the present.

After a short interlude together,  
 I courteously bade my friend  
 A Harty goodbye, whereupon

That self same matter  
 He had just touched on  
 Began to eat at my brain.

In the midst of my turmoil, as I strolled,  
 Reciting a favorite poem to myself,  
 so as to Perhaps annul the  
 So long neglected, so long forgotten,  
 Issue...

I kicked at the grass  
 along my path with my foot as I walked,  
 And discovered by doing so  
 several burrowing ants  
 Who had chosen cracks in the brickwork  
 To found their next colony.

An ant, at least, can cooperate,  
 And an ant is admirably integrated  
 Into his society,  
 I morosely pondered,  
 Shrinking myself in my mind's eye  
 To his posture,  
 Wondering if there too,  
 Amidst the heaps of rotting flesh  
 And whatever else Ants harvested  
 Off of the planes of Earth,  
 I might succumb to  
 The same complaints.



# Into the canvas with Paul Rhoads



## JOACHIM BAYENS

I have known co-founder and editor (of 'The Muse Commands') Paul Rhoads for several years. We met on YouTube when Paul commented on a video of mine reviewing Dr. Jordan B. Peterson's visit to the Netherlands at the Dutch Lion convention. My incoherent musings were enough to pique Paul's interest, and we began talking. Since then, Paul has always been somewhat of a mentor to me.

When Paul set up his discord server, he invited me, and I eventually joined the painters in their drawing exercises. In the summer of 2022, I finally saw occasion to accept Paul's invitation to come paint with him in France. I ended up staying 2 1/2 weeks, extending my stay because of the great pleasure I took in this company and that of Daniel, my fellow student, as well as the progress I was seeing in all respects. Here I will speak personally, as a student of Paul, and relate my experiences in his studio.

Seeing Paul in person for the first time was very odd: His trademark smile seemed almost ethereal when it was not featured on a body of artificial light. His manner and speech, however, were no different from what I was used to, and this greatly aided my coming to terms with the fact that I was now "in a video", as we would

often joke between ourselves.

We drove to the river for a swim and then continued on to the Rhoads estate, where we sat down for dinner (Turkey and onions accompanied by the sliding whistles of the Hoosier Hotshots) and much animated conversation into the still watches of the night.

The next few days, until the arrival of my fellow student, were dedicated to drawing.

Now, in drawing, I already had some experience as an autodidact manga artist — part of it beneficial, part of it not.

It became clear immediately that I had to rethink the way I went about "filling the page". Prior to Paul's online instruction, I had been in the habit of drawing from wherever I started, typically the head of a figure, and sketching the figure from there, having to guess where it would end up in the page.

This is easier to do when there are very limited formulas for drawing in an abstract way; when it came to making a traditional portrait, however, it quickly became clear that I would have to sit through a lot more preparation than I was used to. This had already been addressed in a rudimentary way online with the dreaded "cereal box" exercise, where the page had to be filled in





with basic lines designating the torso and limbs and constructing the figures from there on.

It was a matter of placing key points to refer to in order to, first, fill the page, and then disclose space.

Is the subject in the center of the page? Does it fill all of it?

Applying this method to a person in front of me required different techniques, most prominently constant measuring using my pencil. Is point A closer to point B or to point C? Is point A higher or lower than point C?

Another weak point that could be addressed while drawing was my understanding of values. Is point A darker than point B? What is the darkest part of the drawing?

These lessons came together when I drew the house, which was probably the most difficult drawing. I had problems fitting the different parts of the structure that I could see into the page while staying faithful to their spatial relations; I had to make sure the corners of the top of the tower were at the correct distance from each other in order to convey the point of view; I had to darken certain parts in order to emphasize others that were in the foreground.

By and large, the drawing exercises carried over to painting. One or two things, perhaps, or more particular to drawing with pencil, such as the quality and direction of my etch lines — these did not tend to have a different weight in my manga drawings, which had an effect I always found satisfying, but which Paul did not





approve of while I was drawing a serious portrait.

I spent four days drawing, reading "Krazy Kat" (which will forever remain a profound influence), and working on the magazine with Paul until the arrival of Daniel, which kicked off the painting lessons. Armed with some rudimentary understanding of drawing, I now set to painting my very first oil picture.

With the delightful fruits of the land arrayed before me, I once again had to ask basic questions: where do I put all of it, what's the highest point, where are the outer extremities, where should the highest point be in the painting, how much space do I leave above the fruit?

I drew, and set to painting with the colors Paul had provided.

Paul's quick demonstration as well as my experience painting conveyed a deeper dimension to the value problem in drawing. Aside from light and dark, which remained crucial (For instance, in differentiating the leftmost part of the onion from the potato), there were now the additional variables of temperature and intensity that could be used to differentiate one fruit from the other, to bring certain fruits or parts of them closer by warming them up or darkening them, and doing the opposite to make them recede. Paul had already joked: it's all about the halftones!

The question of theme also appeared, mostly in the relation-

ship between the background I had made, the parts of the still life that were in contact with it, and the table cloth. There is a warm quality to the lower part of the background that threatened to mute out the potato, and a colder brighter part that did the same to the green of the onion.

During painting, we would regularly consult Paul. The following should give a cursory impression of how he would teach.

The master would nearly always have the final say in whether the drawing was sufficient to start painting; otherwise, Paul would be about his work, occasionally glancing at our progress to offer critiques on placement, values, and colors. To the dismay of the perplexed student, the master would habitually conclude his instruction, however brief, with: "Make it look nice!"

The nearing completion of a successful painting would be heralded with a "oy, what a priddy pitcha', a purdy pitcha'!"\*

The second painting demanded more in terms of drawing: getting the pots' sizes and shapes right was difficult.

For my third, I got started on painting faces: that of one of the busts out in the yard. Here, it was a matter of filling the page right and paying attention to warming up certain parts of the shaded areas, where light rebounded from below and provided a lovely glow under the chin.

Daniel featured in number four. I found it difficult to get his features right, particularly the nose and eyes. Should have spent more time drawing. Other than that, a few highlights was all I needed to finish this one up

quickly. That was the main lesson here: a painting doesn't take much if you work from dark to light.

Five and six were experiments in theme and contrast. One is cool in the back and warm in the front, the other has those inverted.

Paul thought the backgrounds were distracting, but considered the end results permissible — the dark red in particular had to be toned down considerably, lest it overpower the subject. I had to pay special attention to painting the leaves.

My first and only self portrait in oils was the grueling climax, pushing me to the limit on all the fronts I had developed on. My complete inability to get my own features right had everything to do with errors in interpreting the way the face would look from the vantage point that I had chosen. "The mouth needs to be more up and forward" Paul kept saying, until I finally went mad: "but Paul, it would end up outside of my face, like a Groeningesque caricature!"

Paul even went as far as to paint a gouache portrait of me to show what he was talking about — the brooding expression he conveyed was almost palpable.

My choices in color were a bit boring, but they well served a reasonably convincing flesh tone. The cheek still lacks volume,

\*Krazy Kat style talk, which my father and I often used together. PR



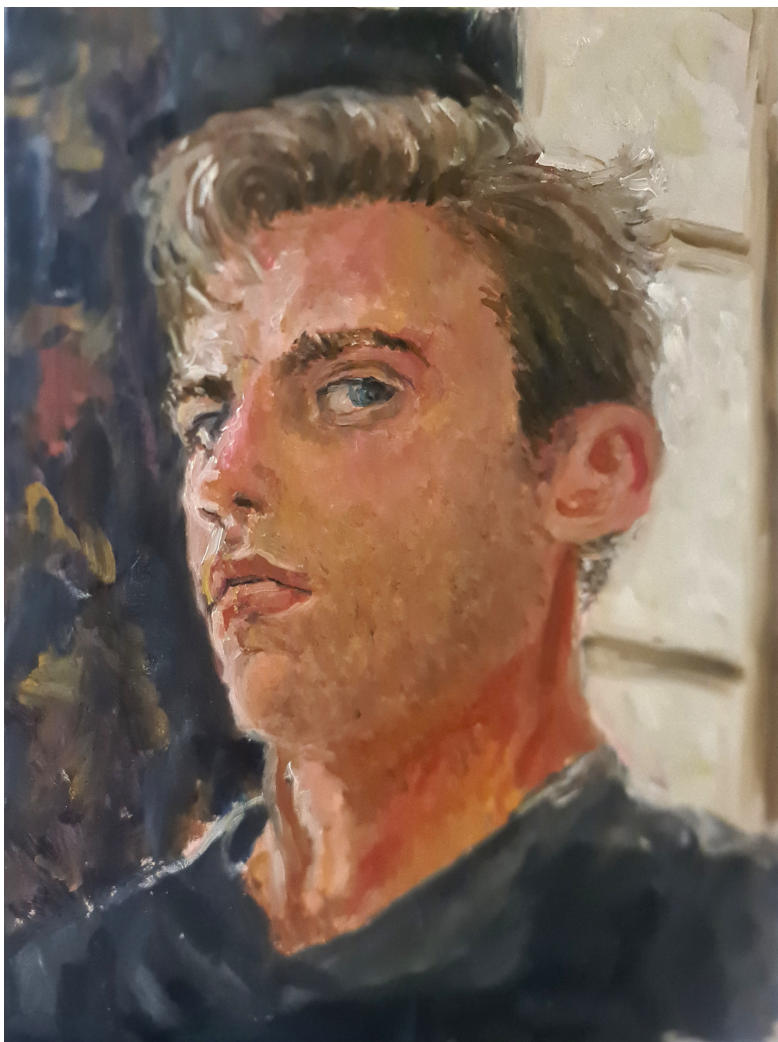
and I'm told I made myself look younger than I really do.

Finally, I started a landscape that I left as it was on the day of my departure. The challenge here was disclosing distance, using color to my advantage while establishing different overlapping parts of the painting. This I found terrifically confusing. The painting, though small, took a lot of thinking . . .

What else did monsieur Miyagi teach me? We talked of life: of wine and women, of life in France, about cats, and about myself. Be kind to women, show interest and don't judge; grab kittens and squish them, they are made of rubber and that's what they're used to.

We would engage in profound philosophical conversation deep into the night, some of which was recorded, be it on video or on the pages of our first issue.

The delight I found in Paul's company, to me, testifies to the integrity of his mission, a relationship of trust and friendship is what characterizes our joint effort in painting and



public discourse. I remember well how we both played at being distressed when the train doors closed for departure. I should not have been surprised to find that all too genuine tears escaped me when the train began moving, which recur even now as I recall the figure of my teacher receding from view.

The challenge today is not to let that figure, falling ever further into my memories until the day of my prospective return, distract me from the Paul who is with me here as the soul that gives life to my canvas. Of this soul I have written, so as to invite the reader to meet him.





# Contemporary Music

SUZANNE FOURNIER

Is it without emotion and sensibility, and if so because it is not centered on the desire or the search for them? But perhaps, even so, it is not without poetry and visionary qualities or sonic experimentation: 'sound for sound's sake'?

Could it be a quest for pleasure related to abstraction, and resulting from abstraction, as with a mathematician whose 'understanding' is based on logic, or 'mechanical thinking', the complexities of which are a sort of juggling of codes, images, words, subtle invisibilities resulting in a synthesis characterized by 'abstraction' and expressed in a musical work. Such an extremely complex and structured development of thought, provoked by ideas linked to "pure spirit" permit a result which might be a "pleasurable understanding" of a concept in all its complexity.

Such work, such research, is a "poetic absolute", a desire to reach beyond mere taste instinctively and directly reached, an auditory experience related to sensations, reactions or emotions which are an overflow of sensibility provoked by musical phrases attractive because of finely harmonized melodies which allow the mind to travel into various states of joy, melancholy, nostalgia and etc..

In abstraction, in the elaboration of a concept, the unique and final pleasure is for the mind which rejoices in concept. It can be compared to the opposition between animal force or gut reaction as opposed to the exigencies of ratiocination, understanding the elaboration of a unfolding thought which requires a prior reflection and conceptualization beyond the sphere of sensation, not linked to "primitive" or easily accessible qualities which might nonetheless be present in such elaborations through sophisticated forms nonetheless involving rhythms, melodies or timbres.

These various elements contribute to render the work of the composer of 'contemporary music' an intellectual pleasure, while learning and performing such music is, for the interpreter, a subtle pleasure in confrontation with the conceptual and the obligation to put into action, to realize or reify, such synthesis of complex and abstract structures in a concrete musical performance.

Basic example:

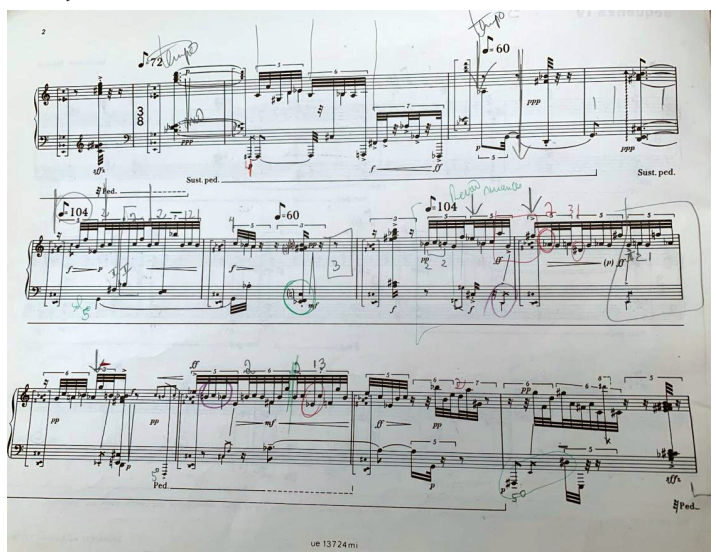
4/4 with polyrhythms 9 against 7 including silences (456)123... 789 contre 1234567 in one beat + another rhythmic configuration on 2nd, 3rd and 4th beat. The following measure: a simple binary 4/4 with 3/8 or 9/16 triplets... with such complex rhythmic structures following, for thousands of measures, plus frequent changes of tempo, all of which must be mastered in order to play the piece correctly, to say nothing of the notes themselves, from



the highest to the lowest registers. All this demands precise execution, particularly the passages from one group of notes, or phrase, to the next so that the whole piece is seamlessly executed.

All these elements contribute to the intellectual excitement of such work both in the writing and the playing. The confrontation with such mastery of the conceptual spirit and capacity of structural synthesis — a special form of abstraction — and the obligation to realize a musical performance, is a "subtle" pleasure.

## Sequenza 4 de Berio





# L'isle joyeuse

Stockhausen klavierstucke 9

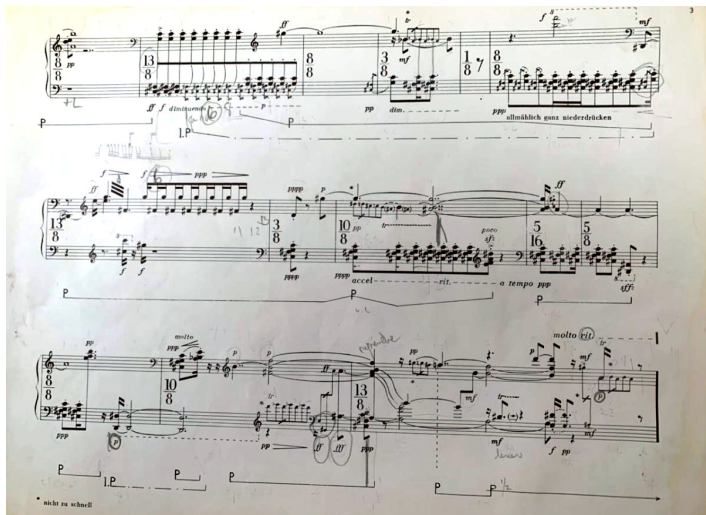
Matt Wildermuth

*An ode to the music of Debussy, written to discuss — in a sense — the influence his music has had on my work as a poet.*

No more stay these sails, but swell them with abeyance  
To such elusive gestures as the sea accords,  
Surge after each recursive surge, abating  
To flood upon each moment's wave the next;  
Expectant heaving perpetually.

As upon the forlorn shores of Cythera,  
Where scattered in myrtle and sand lie  
Tablets engraved of lovers, whose soft voices  
Have whispered into the wind, never again  
To be heard, near on the sand rise yet  
An array of columns near ruin, tableless  
But for the repose of each nutant dawn  
So beyond the ebullient luster  
Which sweeps about the coast only to sigh  
And recede, there yet sustains and heaves  
An intimate depth, unrestrained by vision,  
Conceiving of each fertile present,  
Yet so vast as to drown the hall of sapphire  
From eyes too yielding before ever ceding  
Their witness to the plunge of sun to sea.

No, I seek not a watery temple  
To the dissipating crests of my vessel's wake;  
Only open to cast me forth, as waves  
Each moment will already grasp again,  
While yet the deep retains a sense of seizure.



Suzanne Fournier, gouache, life size, P. Rhoads—page 22 idem



# John David Ebert's Semiotic Vacancy

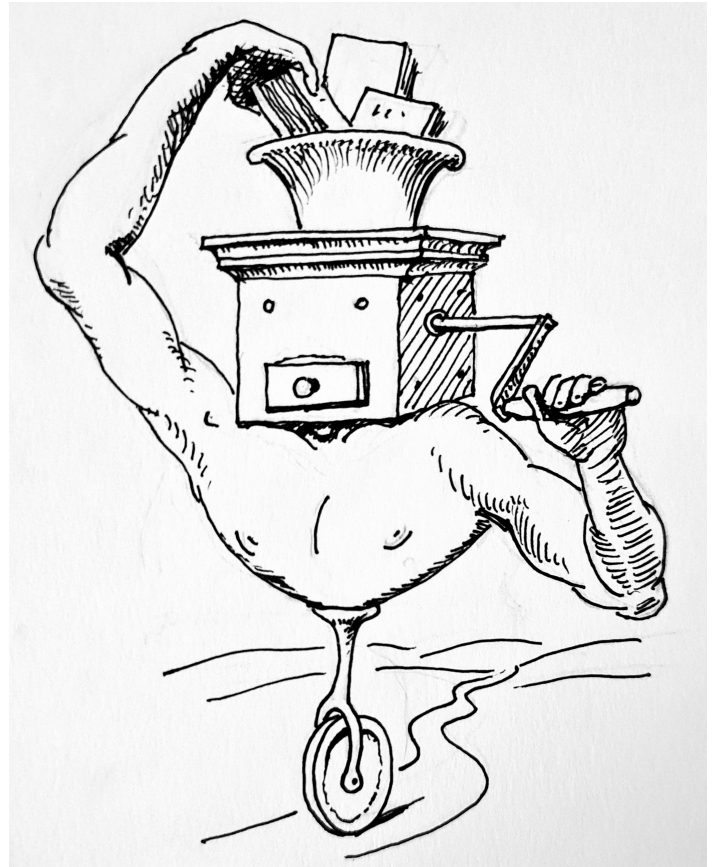
PAUL RHOADS

There is a type of public intellectual I call 'grey powder merchants'. They are like coffee grinders: beans are poured into a funnel at the top and ground coffee is milled into a tray below. Not beans but anything of a philosophical, historical, moral or artistic nature is ingested by these guys, and what comes out is a fine, grey powder, a reliably consistent product of the crank driven grinder between funnel and mouth. They have read everything. Like the sophists Socrates had to deal with, they pretend to know everything. They talk fluently. They publish a steady stream of screeds and tomes. They are neither stupid nor dishonest . . . not exactly dishonest — unless you call indifference to reality and total absorption in a wonderful world of verbal arabesques and abstractions in the service of money-getting and flattery 'dishonest'.

John David Ebert is such a one; a sophist of our time. A flatterer; he flatters those in the precarious situation of 'contemporary art' — which might be compared to the Bastille in 1788, the Russian imperial government in 1816 or the Weinmar republic in the early 1930s. 'Contemporary art' is the emblem of our post-truth and post-law masters, a passel of soulless mercantile oligarchs who, though presently in a position of overwhelming dominance, are surrounded by a growing crowd of discontented peasants, over-excited idealists, and organized thugs. These are the Yellow Jackets, the Trumpists and Brexiteers, the Antifas and Proud Boys, or whatever 'populist' creature will next be called fourth from the underbelly of society by their provocations. Such provocations often take the form — if it can be called a form — of 'contemporary art'. One wonders if at least a few of these technocratic oligarchs are not asking themselves how many more monumental green plastic sex-toys, or other such wicked innovations, can be

inflicted upon an unconsulted demos without consequences. However complaisant most of them appear to be, Ebert would not bother performing his tricks if they weren't buying what he's selling, and his market is driven by fear.

Despite their present power, their vast economy of schools, galleries, museums and publications — despite the absence of a significant rival or recognized theoretical



challenge — 'contemporary artists' are perched on ontological ejection seats. More or less obscurely they realize this.

The flattery Ebert lavishes on them is less praise, less description, analysis and explanation of their "original" and "important" "work", than something more fundamental, for praise and analysis of 'contemporary art' must, first of all, repose on something more basic than the 'work' itself, namely the fiction that something which is not, is, or, more exactly: that 'contemporary art' is Art. Ebert himself cleverly calls it "a very different kind of art from anything that has ever been practiced in the past". And well he might, for anyone not already perverted by an Ebert style 'education' is perplexed, if not astonished or even scandalized, when informed that the stuff in question is 'art'.

If Ebert is going to legitimize 'contemporary art', he must meet the suspicion, the more and more openly expressed opinion, that it is not 'art', even of "a very different kind".

Ebert is a doctor of the church of 'contemporary art'. He is like the priests for whom the grey powder merchants of rationalism and materialism love to express disdain as profiteering promulgators of fable and myth, as comforters of weak and nervous beings troubled about their existential status. Like a priest in a pulpit his sermons are not for the scoffers and unbelievers who guffaw in the fleshpots outside the temple but for a faithful flock, quietly and obediently eager to hear 'good news'.





## Ebert's Bag of Tricks

Ebert's sermons are not for the great unwashed who fail to comprehend, much less appreciate, 'contemporary art'. Such backward folk are incapable of understanding even half a phrase out of Ebert's mouth. These knuckle-dragging plebs are, as Ebert himself might say: 'semiotically challenged'.

Not being semiotically challenged myself I understand what Ebert means when he says: "The beautiful canvasses of Mark Rothko [...] paint the semiotic vacancies at the heart of Being". Were this phrase meant for the common man it might be rendered into normal English as: "You miserable uncultured slob cannot understand the beauty of a Rothko, nor can you realize how cleverly I have tossed a plausible word salad to spuriously explain its alleged importance, namely calling a big square patch of color 'empty' yet qualifying that emptiness as somehow ultra real." The uncultured slob wouldn't understand this version much better than the original jargon but Ebert himself might admit it is a fair translation. It might even make him smile because, as I say, Ebert is obviously not a stupid man. But his fancy talk is not for the unwashed. It is for the 'artists', for all who live and die, materially or spiritually, by 'contemporary art'.

The basis of Ebert's success is his awareness of the precariousness of the 'contemporary art' situation, the insecurity of his audience and how much they would appreciate a robust justification of their fundamentally criminal activities. Like any good priest, Ebert offers them justification and he constructs this justification on a solid foundation: Arthur Danto's Warhol inspired proclamation of 'the death of art'.

Ebert's solution to this apparent impasse is as unoriginal as Danto's recognition of art's death in Warhol is obvious. At one point Ebert expresses it this way: "Each artist idiosyncratically constructs his own world, his own private semiosphere with its own logic". I did not have to wait until 2013 and the publication of 'Art After Metaphysics' to hear this justification. I heard it repeatedly in the 1970s, at a time when Ebert was not even ten years old. Ebert, of course, makes no claim to originality in this regard, and I do not fault him for using ideas which the advent of artistic post-modernism (with the fall of the iron curtain) — in other words 'the collapse of faith in historical progress' — has rendered unconvincing. I admire, rather, his audacity. Personally I would

never dare defend an idea I knew to be nonsense. I don't know for a fact that Ebert thinks the idea that each artist idiosyncratically constructs his own world is nonsense but he is not a stupid man and, strictly speaking, the idea that 'each artist idiosyncratically constructs his own world' is 'nonsense', for what is 'sense' without correspondence between signifier and signified?

If each 'art' is its own world with its own logic, there may be 'sense', or signifiers corresponding to a signified within each world according to the logic of each, but when speaking of 'contemporary art', or the ensemble of those worlds, signifiers universally applicable, by Ebert's own definition, are nuncupatory.

Is Ebert's slight of hand really so hard to see? If the art, the sense, the logic of a thing depends upon the dynamics of an

independent world, a horizon of discovery, a closed system of values proper only to itself, where there is no meaning, no comprehension, no art, except within that particular and unique context, we may, in charity and inevitable ignorance — for how can we know such a world? — admit that whatever it is generating internally is 'art' in some unknowable sense, but how can we possibly *know* this? Ebert himself affirms that these worlds cannot be compared, that they are "entirely different worlds altogether", "world islands" in which each artist is a priest officiating at the private mystery cult of which his art is the product. Each world is a 'private mystery'. Hard to imagine a more closed system!

Whatever is produced in these "idiosyncratic" "worlds" may be 'art' in the context of whatever that world 'is', but is that 'art' still 'art' in another world, in another context, for example the context of ordinary

life where we live together, in which communication between us is worthwhile, to say nothing of possible? What world is it where Ebert, though writing and speech, communicates with millions of his fellow humans and is, apparently, understood?

Ebert's trick depends on distractions which conceal from his unwary targets how he is hiding a rabbit in a hat he has just revealed to be empty. To prepare them for the notion of 'contemporary art' as products of disparate and idiosyncratic worlds, but also as the conglomerate of such products, X number of radically incommensurable worlds, he first proclaims that the history of art, in fact of humanity itself, is also such a set of radically incommensurable things, namely the pre-metaphysical, metaphysical and Post-metaphysical 'ages'.



This painting, from about 2010, according to Ebert would be an ontologically dead copy of, in his words: a 'kitchy catholic sentimental clinging to an iconotype which has gone down the drain of history because of the collapse of the macrosphere'. To me, however, it's a sincere effort to depict a scene from the bible, which I believe to be a historical event and which I have tried to depict as I imagine it. I, of course, do not get to be a semiotic world with my own logic. I'm just historical garbage.



This, of course, is a vulgarized elaboration of heideggerian historicism: each culture, in each age, is a world unto itself, a 'horizon of discovery' or, as Ebert puts it, a 'semiosphere with its own logic'. As Time trundles along, new 'worlds' or 'horizons of discovery', or 'semiospheres with their own logic' arise, each a closed book to the others. We cannot understand the past, which has another logic, another manner of being than ours.

Ebert's innovation, which is the innovation of 'contemporary art' from its inception, is to grant the status of 'semiosphere with its own logic' first to the different Cultures of History and then,



by extension, via a logorrhea of rationalization, to each individual 'artist' of today. But when anyone who says he is an 'artist' is an artist, potentially everyone is an artist. In Ebert's post-metaphysical age therefore, each and every one of us, at least potentially, is the generator of his very own semiosphere and logic. But, if this is the case, how can anyone understand anyone else? And why would anyone even bother addressing themselves to anyone else?

If the situation is what Ebert says it is, it is Babel, and no one can understand anyone else. Except we do. We not only understand each other, we also understand all those cultures in the past. Or at least Ebert does, and with astonishing glibness. It takes him only a few seconds to explain exactly how each one was and how the people of each age thought and felt. For example, in the pre-metaphysical age everyone felt like they were floating in amniotic fluid, while in the metaphysical age, the 'Age of the World Picture', Michelangelo and Hieronymus Bosch painted on the



'world dome' which was a manifestation of the 'perspectival age' and discovery of space.

## The Discovery of Perspective

The alleged discovery of perspective has always annoyed me, because although painting did indeed become decadent after the fall of the Roman empire, and even if Alberti and such people did make fine use of fully rationalized perspectival techniques, Alberti no more discovered perspective than he — or anyone else — invented space. Many Roman murals, for example, display full consciousness of space and perspective.

This Roman wall decoration from the Metropolitan museum in New York (left), with which I am very familiar, though not perspectivally consistent in the strict manner of Alberti, is fully perspectival throughout. The same is true of the so called 'Italian primitives' such as Duccio (above, 1255-1318)

who worked more than a century prior to the alleged 'discovery of perspective' (Alberti: 1425-1472). But no one is gushing, as they do of cubism, how such paintings use 'multiple spaces', thus 'breaking down space' — which is somehow



a good thing. Nor do they enthuse that it not only 'breaks down' but actually multiplies 'spaces', 'times' and 'points of view', as Ebert ridiculously does of cubism.

So, to say nothing of how the hyper-intellectualized claims for cubism, regarding perspective, space and point of view could, with equal reason, be applied to Roman frescos and the Italian primitives, it is also a fact that cubism has nothing to do with African

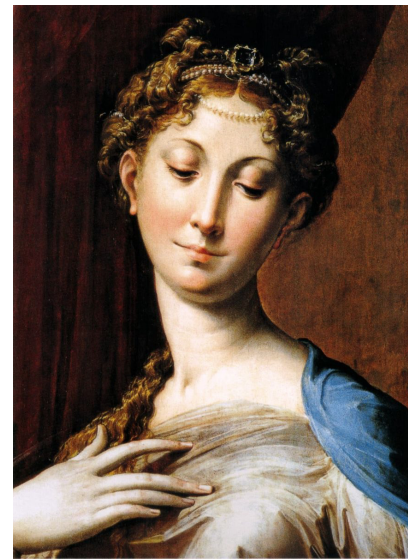




Michelangelo, 1475–1564



El Greco, 1541–1614



Parmigianino, 1503–1540

art, because it owes everything to the influence of Cezanne. The idea that cubism uses different points of view simultaneously is a rationalization invented by critics to justify cubism's distortions. But these famous distortions are only a traditional painting practice carried out in an exceptionally free, unbridled or, if you like, irresponsible manner; an impulse, endemic to its time, which sought to make painting more abstract, pure and about itself, while at the same time exploring ideas about expressiveness. All this is understandable without resort to philosophically dubious elucubrations. Ingres himself indulged in deformations, such as creating anatomically impossible figures (see page 26). Picasso simply went further in the same direction. But such expressive distortions have always been at the heart of the western painting tradition, to say nothing of other painting traditions. If western painting has gone farther than any other in the direction of illusion and realism, it has, no less than Asian, African or any other art tradition, always used expressive deformation. A special glory of western painting is how expressive deformation is used in conjunction with a mastery of illusion and realism. This conjunction was an aspect of

the painting tradition which the early modernists sought to restore. They were disappointed at growing 'academic' neglect of it, in favor of a uni-dimensional illusionist realism.

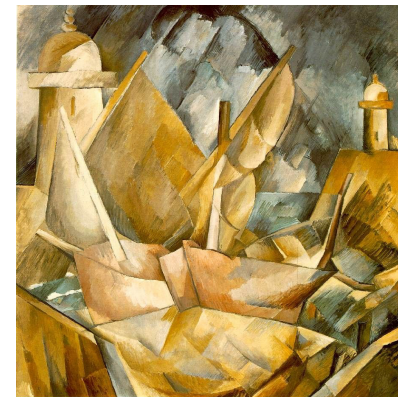
The deformations of cubism, fauvism, the Nabis and post-impressionism had nothing to do with a new mode of perception or some ontological evolution or any new kind of space — assuming there could be a new kind of space, which there cannot. The 2d wave modernists were exploring aspects of painting which had always been central to the western tradition, in ways which made sense at the time.

Since 1990, most of those ways should be understood as of historical interest

in the story of so called 'modernism' as an essentially reactionary effort to restore the glories of the old masters, menaced by 'academic' illusionist decadence. By the 1960s, however, modernism was also overwhelmed by the ideological mire it initially combatted. This matter merits a detailed treatment. Here it must suffice to indicate how certain catch phrases, irresponsible notions concocted during the 20th century to rationalize or justify various sorts of foolishness or even to gin up progressive 'innovation', today serve people like Ebert as they construct narratives comforting to the most sclerotic academicism which has ever



Paul Cezanne



Georges Braque. Note how this painting presents a coherent space, in no way ambiguous or unclear, not, as Ebert claims "melted down" and no less definite than the example of roman painting—see left—or even Ingres. The painting is busy but spatially coherent.



This painting does not use strict perspective, but not only does it use perspective, but it has a fully developed sense of space. Such spatial sense is natural to painting, and, except for the most primitive, deliberate of feigned, is more or less developed in painting of all times and societies.





James Joyce, by Jacques-Emile Blanche

shamed a human society. 'Perspective', 'space' and 'point of view', as they apply, or not, to roman, pre-Renaissance, Renaissance and 'modernist' painting are nice examples of this inanity. There are more but these should suffice to puff away the house of cards which is the pre-'contemporary art' progressive history narrative which Ebert elaborates as a basis for justification of 'contemporary art' itself. One example, also, will suffice to show the inanity of this justification.

### Duchampian Irony

Ebert credits Duchamp with introducing the 'banal object' as 'art'. According to Ebert the 'banal object' is a shard of the obsolete and shattered 'iconotypes' which constituted the defunct 'macrosphere'. The ensemble of these shards are Ebert's 'midden heap', or 'dung pile' — Ebert delights in associating excrement with the broken 'iconotypes', or bible stories, which were the subject of so much traditional painting.

The banal objects in question are, initially, Duchamp's 'Ready-mades'. But the Ready-mades are not 'art', nor are they 'banal'. In interviews readily accessible on YouTube, Duchamp explains what they are: rare things which are something like the opposite of art.

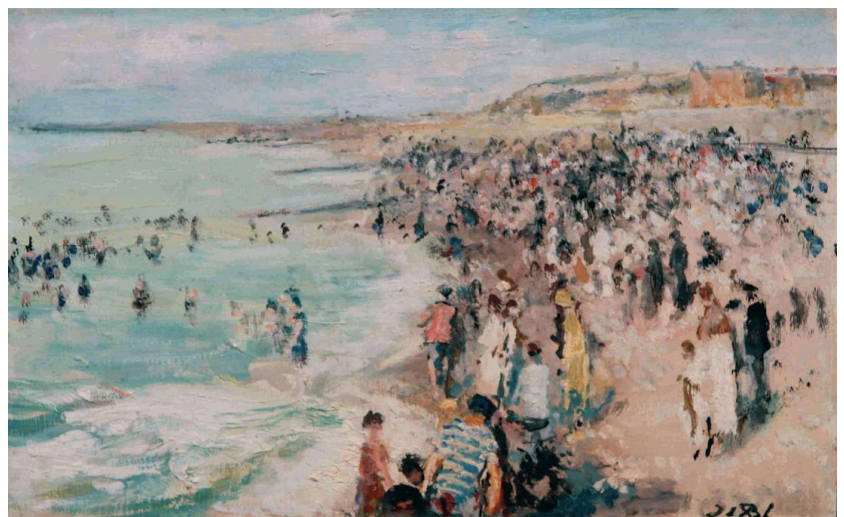
To understand Ebert's neglect of the facts of this

matter, we must know something about them ourselves. To begin with, it was for good and sufficient reasons, related to his time and personal experiences, that Duchamp, with the other dadaists, engaged in various unusual activities, the lowest common denominator of which was a serious yet playful exploration of what Art really is or can be. These explorations were sincere. They were neither nihilist nor cynical, and certainly not intended to come to the conclusion that anything is art, even if — and this is an aspect of his irony — Duchamp made certain declarations which have been seized upon as proving that 'anything can be art', while the context of those declarations and his words and acts pointing in other directions (e.g. 'rasée') are neglected. If Duchamp is ironic and playful, if his art and statements can be difficult to understand, one thing at least is clear: Duchamp did not endorse the idea that anything is art. His search did not culminate in the conclusion that the search was never worth undertaking in the first place since anything and everything, everywhere and always becomes 'art' by mere recontextualization.

'Recontextualization' is a fancy word for calling something 'art'.

Duchamp did say that what he says *is Art*, is Art, because, as an artist, he says it is. And he did say that he is an artist because *he says he is*. But that Duchamp says of *himself* that he is an artist does not mean that any knave or fool who says of *himself* that he is an artist is therefore also an artist. Duchamp was neither knave nor fool. Only fools fail to understand duchampian irony, and only knaves exploit his statements to garner prestige for themselves.

Dadaist motivations were artistic but had a unique historical context. The horrors of the first world war had breached the walls of complacent western optimism, of innocent faith in a progressive and harmonious future dominated by European science and post-christian morals. And even if early 'modernism' had combatted 'academic' decadence with much success, 2d wave 'modernism' had begun to fall into error. The cubists themselves, inspired more by political and philosophical ideology than artistic and painting concerns, constituted themselves as an ideologically driven academy, even worse than the official 19th century academy under such



Jacques-Emile Blanche





Igor Stravinsky, by Jacques-Émile Blanche

men like Bouguereau. Duchamp became their victim when he was ceremoniously excluded from their ranks, despite such paintings as the 'Nude Descending a Staircase'.

The dadaist were horrified, disgusted and disappointed with the world they found themselves in. The betrayal of their fellow 'modernists', to say nothing of the betrayal of the west generally, as exemplified by the cheerful murderousness of the war and academic illusionism in particular — Duchamp's complaints about 'retinal painting' is partly explained by the latter.

In some ways that situation resembles our own. I, at least, see the world around me as artistically chaotic, decadent and evil. No less than the dadaists I reject it altogether and, like Duchamp, am dedicated to a relentless and radical search for true Art, far from the madding crowd.

## Dada and Bohemia

An effort of imagination is required to recapture the mood and circumstances of the 1920s and 30s, to understand and sympathize with the attitudes and motivations of men like Marcel Duchamp and Tristan Tzara. There was then no 'art world' in the sense there is today. Instead there was a small but international community of people living in more or less 'bohemian' ways which is to say: impecuniously and not necessarily according to the rigors and

comforts of the bourgeois norm. There were no galleries — or hardly any — no museums, no shows dedicated to contemporary artists and no art publications other than what they managed to produce or stage themselves — sometimes with patronage on a scale which in today's terms was laughably scanty. Artists were not yet looked upon as prophetic 'creators' to be rewarded with vast fame and fortune for providing 'cultural' bona fides to an arrogant and corrupt planetary oligarchy obsessed with resource exploitation and social control.

Such people were sincerely interested in Art. They embraced the sacrifices they knew necessary to the artistic life for the sake of its rewards and delights. These did not include prospects of worldwide fame and fortune. Even eventually successful painters like Corot or Renoir did no more than make a decent living. If painters like Picasso and Matisse, or tricksters like Dali (whom I was lucky enough to meet on several occasions in New York in the 1970s), were already vaguely known to the general public, and unquestionably heroes in the bohemian milieu, they were not yet the popular and iconic 'cultural' giants they were to become after the war. Before the war, and despite the now famous controversies among the surrealists, the agitations for and against abstraction and so on, there was what might be called an artistic brotherhood, a community of artistic values and aspirations. The painters, poets and composers knew of each other, and often knew each other personally. Nothing like any of this exists today, apart from the larping.

The diaries of Jacques-Émile Blanche (1861-1942) show us this world. Blanche, who as a boy spent much time in Manet's studio, knew, and painted portraits, of virtually every painter, writer and composer of his day, both in France and England. It is understandable that he, and many other important artists of the period, have dropped out of our awareness. It is inevitable and useful to have simplified and synthetic introductions to complex matters like the history of painting. But ever since I discovered a small painting by Jacques-Émile Blanche in the museum of Albi, he has been an important influence on my own work. His diaries, always translated and published in English, were widely appreciated prior to the war. In those diaries, to say nothing of the journals of Andre Gide, the conversations of Vollard and other writings, it is possible to learn about the actual concerns and preoccupations of the 'modernists'. These first hand testimonies give the lie to the smoothly rationalized narratives which pollute popular notions of the period pushed by the likes of Ebert. The history of painting is large and complex. We cannot expect it to be presented in all its aspects by theorists and critics. We might expect, however, that it be presented fairly. There is no excuse for people like Ebert who crouch in dark corners spinning webs of lies, when the truth of these matters is easy to learn.

Already, by the end of the 19th century, the so called 'academy' had been partly convinced of 'modernist' — in fact reactionary\* —

\* In Ambroise Vollard's conversations with Renior, published in 1938, speaking of impressionism Renoir brushed aside all theoretical talk about light and the spectrum: "We just wanted to use bright colors again, like the old masters!"



ideas so that, if ideologically hampered approaches such as bouguereauism persisted, impressionism and Cezanne, or so called 'post-impressionism' — what I call '2d wave modernism' — had an important influence. Despite the famous exclusion of the Impressionist from the Salon in 1863, the 'academy' had never been a fortress, and so called 'academic' painting from the latter part of the 19th century, and beginning of the 20th, shows all kinds of 'modernist' influence. It is hard to get a feeling for this without travelling to out of the way places, provincial museums and churches, where the work of painters one has never heard of can be experienced, painters who don't fit the tidy narratives of the John David Eberts of this world, and give the lie to his sweeping assertions.



First painting made under the influence of Jacques-Emile Blanche—1995? Such interiors were a large part of the work by which I supported myself as a painter for many years. In this sense I own some of my livelihood to J-E Blanche.

## Aesthetics and Art

Aesthetics are related to Art but Art is not equal to aesthetics. This is true because everything is aesthetic. Looked at in the right spirit a heap of dung is an aesthetic object no less than the Mona Lisa. But not everyone is visually oriented. Not everyone is concerned with beauty, much less Art; for such people 'Art' is what is indicated to them as such, just as I trust my mechanic to indicate the proper fuel for my car. I have no more sensitivity to the problem of the relation of fuels to motors — though it is a matter constantly absorbing the attention of thousands of intelligent and energetic persons — than some people have to painting. But for a person such as myself, for whom art is a constant concern, and because aesthetics are an aspect of art, I, and people like myself, have aesthetic consciousness.<sup>†</sup> Having an aesthetic consciousness means seeing the beauty in everything; not only a bright sunny day but the charm of mist and rain, not only a fresh and youthful face but the experience, pain and wisdom carved into the countenance of those nearing death. Aesthetic consciousness means receptivity to the messages of things seen, heard, sensed or tasted. Having aesthetic consciousness may be 'artistic', but is not the same as being an artist. It is important to being an artist, in certain ways, but it is by no means the only thing needful. And just because everything is included in aesthetic experience or, to put it another way, just because everything is aesthetic, does not mean everything is Art.

Art is distinct from aesthetics in the same way that daily life is distinguished from a love relationship. Such a relationship may be lived everyday, and may express itself though certain banal and ordinary activities but those activities, as such, are not the relation-

<sup>†</sup> I do not mean to denigrate lack of aesthetic consciousness! It takes all kinds to make a world, and those who lack aesthetic consciousness may well have other kinds of consciousness, to which I lack sensitivity, which opens aspects of the world to them which are closed to me.

ship of love. They may, to the contrary, be a source of conflict which the relationship of love must overcome in order to persist. In the same way there is an aspect of aesthetics which interferes with Art.

Aesthetic experience, for example, has nothing to do with taste. Since anything and everything is aesthetic, an aesthetic experience might involve things which are in bad taste — or let us say, not in the best taste. We might look at extremely perverted tastes which offer striking examples of the problem, but let's take an artistic example: enthusiasm for the art of Frank Frazetta. It is easy to admire Frazetta and have a powerful aesthetic experience with his work. But people who turn to seri-

ous painting are handicapped by the poor taste which gives to Frazetta, in their eyes, a rank he does not deserve. My point is not to denigrate Frazetta. I enjoy him as much as the next person. But I know the difference between a drawing by Frazetta and a drawing by Watteau. Frazetta is fun, skillful, and a bit naughty. Watteau is . . . cosmic. Failure to perceive this difference is a failure of taste. It is not a moral fault but it is an artistic handicap. But the aesthetic sense of those who lack the taste to understand the relative ranks of Frazetta and Watteau may be as acute and alive as in those who do. Taste depends on our natural disposition, our orientation or choices, and our training. The aesthetic *sense*, by contrast, is like vision or hearing. As such it is undirected. Taste is preference. The aesthetic sense can carry us into raptures; our taste discriminates among our raptures.

To know what 'art' is we must understand that it is not aesthetics, and that aesthetics are not taste. Having an aesthetic sense as well as good taste probably helps an artist, but they are not enough to make one a good painter. Other elements are as important, and more important, and these make Art what it is, namely mastery of the art in question, understanding its nature, learning its practice, and following proper directions. The nature of drawing must be the first preoccupation of the draftsman. That nature has nothing to do with aesthetics and taste. Aesthetics and taste had probably better get involved but, as such, they are secondary to the draftsman as draftsman, to the artist as artist.

## The Banal Object

The Ready-mades were a game Duchamp played with himself, which he describes in interviews on YouTube; so there is no need to take any of this on my authority. What I contend here can be swiftly verified or debunked in the words of Duchamp himself. His game, then, was to search for objects which had, for him, no



aesthetic charge. He was not searching for objects that were 'banal'. He was not searching for Art. He was not trying to make Art through some kind of willful choice out of Ebert's 'midden heap' of banal things. He was not revolutionizing the nature of art by reducing it to pure nietzschean will. He was, as he says, searching for things which had no aesthetic impact on him. He eventually found 13. At some point he called them 'Ready-mades' because that is what they all turned out to be. None of the Ready-mades are natural or crafted things. All are industrial products. Was this a discovery for Duchamp about the nature of our technological society about which thoughtful people began to comment as the 20th century progressed?

The Ready-mades, for Duchamp, were objects of a very particular nature: a negative zone in his aesthetic sense. But the presence, the awareness, of negatives reveals the positive. Duchamp's game, then, was exploring, or fine tuning, his aesthetic sense. In so doing he was honing, testing and training an aspect of his artistic nature. If we set aside the ironic remarks which are Duchamp's most famous statements, he never claimed the Ready-mades were Art. He did not rush out to show them. He kept them to himself for 26 years. They were his private 'game', and certainly a thing to share with his friends.

It was some of these friends who eventually persuaded him to show the Ready-mades. They also persuaded him to make signed limited editions to sell. When merchants take over and start advertising, it's like love and war: all is fair. Of course the Ready-mades were sold as 'art' — what else? — and the reason anyone bought them was not because of their intrinsic qualities but because of Duchamp's reputation. Neither the declarations of hucksters nor the reputation of anyone, however interesting or famous, make a thing art. Picasso often settled his restaurant bills by signing a napkin. These signed napkins are still trading for large sums, though the faddish attitude that gives them so much value may be fading. They are valuable because people are ready to pay for them. But that doesn't make them 'art'. People pay for many things which are not art. The Ready-mades and Picasso's napkins are 'artifacts' in the same way an arrowhead from the stone age is, but they are not Art.

## A Fake Truth

The commercial discourse around the Ready-mades and the abuse of Duchamp's irony, have established the unfortunate notion that the Ready-mades are 'art'. But we are not obliged to be stupid or gullible, to follow the crowd and accept a lie, even if a multi-trillion dollar mercantilist empire has been founded on that lie.

Duchamp, even after he had become an international star and was proclaimed the pope of 'a very different kind of art from anything that has ever been practiced in the past', continued to live a quiet and secluded life. He had profited from the patronage of Walter Arensberg but it was only natural, and perhaps even necessary at the time, that he get a bit of money for himself. The argument that Duchamp's cooperation in the marketing of the Ready-mades endorses the use which 'contemporary artists' and the Eberts of this world make of it, is unfair and manipulative but it justifies what has happened to Art. Duchamp's attempt to calm the neo-dadaists with 'rasée', his 'praise' of Warhol's 'happenings' as an innovation which "makes art out of boredom", have had zero effect, except on those who, like himself, are truly interested in Art. When it comes to Art, those are the only people who count.

This does not mean that Duchamp is without some responsibility in all this. He did make quiet 'duchampian' efforts to correct it. His life is an example of devotion to Art; he was indifferent to fame and money. But few take note of those things to model their attitude on his. The last years of his life were devoted to creating

a work of art which not even his friends were aware of. He allowed everyone to believe he had abandoned art! It was his final trick. Duchamp was a profoundly secretive and private person. He was, furthermore, a certain kind of frenchman; the irony and humor, the nice discriminations, the quiet extravagance — he was a certain kind of man, as well as an exceptional man, who lived in a certain time and reacted to it in certain interesting ways. In the light of history some of his actions were irresponsible. But it was another time, and I can understand and sympathize with his part in what has turned out to be a very unhappy mess. I can also see that Duchamp never considered the Ready-mades to be Art. They



Portrait of a Dutch girl, 1998? oil on wood, by P. Rhoads

were part of his intimate adventure, and as such they can have legitimate interest for us. Meanwhile the narrative now firmly woven round them justifies activities and pretensions which have nothing to do with who Duchamp was or what he did. They are vulgar travesties.

Ebert claims that Duchamp, by recontextualizing banal objects, by rescuing them from his 'midden heap' of shattered remnants of the macrosphere, the dung and flotsam of the so called 'meta-physical age', blazed the trail for the 'new kind of art' of the so called 'post-metaphysical age'. But the post-metaphysical age is not a thing. It's a rationalization to justify the claim that things which are not Art, are Art, that 'artists' who are not artists, are artists. That is all it is. Wind; bla bla.

In the howl of this Ebertian wind we lose Duchamp's message: look carefully at all that is around, feel its message, delve into the



problem of beauty, of your reactions, of your relation to the manifest, your relation to your own sensibilities. Duchamp was exploring for himself the limits of his aesthetic reactions, the limits of different aspects of Art. Duchamp's game, if it proves anything, proves not that anything is art if it is recontextualized, but that the aesthetics which are everywhere, are even so not equal: some are more aesthetic than others. What does that imply about you and your reactions?

Art, as Duchamp suggests, is indeed the gesture of an artist, but the true duchampian artist, if he might surprise and delight us, is not a creature of idiosyncratic caprice. Duchamp's 13 Ready-mades are not proof that the most banal objects are art, but a reminder to artistic spirits that such things might relate to art via their own aesthetic experience — or that even the most unexpected things, even the flotsam of our industrial society, can point towards poetry.

It seems that Duchamp's game 'failed'. Did he actually find objects which had no aesthetic charge for him? If he did at first, over the years, at least for us the Ready-mades have taken on aesthetic conviction. They seem to teach that our awareness and sympathies may be raised to surprising heights. It may be an old lesson, but it is worth learning anew, especially in our time.

But pointers towards poetry hidden in the human experience are not, as such, Art, and pretending they are perverts their duchampian usefulness. Instead of refining and elevating our sensibilities, they embolden social authorities who, instead of pointing towards Art as they ought, point to things which are not Art and say "There is Art!" thus perverting and deadening the sensibilities of those who heed them. No longer quietly graceful negative spaces in aesthetic experience pointing towards Art, they are now trophies of an obscurantist and murderous oligarchy who, with shouting and debauchery, parade them like severed heads on the end of a pike.

So, despite Duchamp, every 'contemporary artist' is idiosyncratically constructing a private world, their own semiosphere with their own logic, grabbing up handfuls of dung from the 'midden heap' and flinging it hysterically in the face of anyone and everyone, while drawing round themselves the rent and soiled mantle of Art and loudly reveling in their

prophetic status.

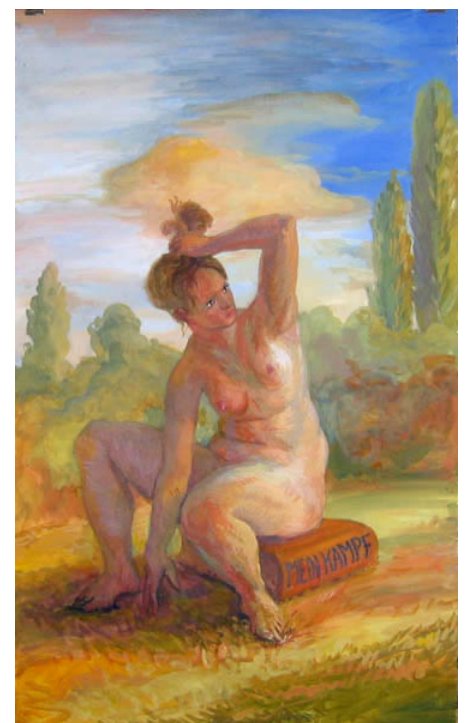
## Universal Transcendent Logic

Ebert is comfortable with this desecration. He justifies and lauds it. But how can he explain it with such ease? How can he encompass each semiosphere and learn each idiosyncratic logic? How can he pretend to his seamless, universal and lucid comprehension of the very things he proclaims to be incomprehensible, of such a nature that understanding them is impossible, for they are unrelated, mutually incompatible, each with its own logic, its own language?

To grasp the inner meaning of all cultures across all time, to explain the idiosyncratic semiospheres of each 'contemporary artist', Ebert must possess an understanding which encompasses all ages and all semiospheres.

Such understanding, which allows him to tell a story in which each age and each 'contemporary artist' has its place, must be founded, or at least translated into, a logic shared by all. But as actual languages, which can be translated into each other, share a foundation of experience and meaning, so the logics of the semiospheres, as translated by Ebert into English, share that experience and meaning.

Ebert's procedure, as he explains it, is to learn the private code of each idiosyncratic semiotic sphere, and its logic. This might seem a mighty task, like going to Mongolia to learn the language and ways of the people, a project that requires years. But, as it turns out, an idiosyncratic semiosphere, with its own logic, is not





difficult to understand. It takes only a matter of minutes: the time required for the 'artist' to explain it — and since there turns out to be so little to explain . . .

Be that as it may, once you have the code you can understand the 'art', art which is a very different kind of art from anything that has ever been practiced in the past, and translate it easily and directly into common language, thereby including it in a universal history graspable by the meanest intelligence.

One wonders why Ebert makes so much fuss about idiosyncratic semiospheres and their logic, if getting the code, and slipping the info into a universal history, is so easy?

Perhaps the code creation, too, is simpler than it seems? As Ebert states it, the process is as follows: the 'artist' must "salvage ruptured signifiers from 'being' to fill semiotic vacancies, thus giving these ruptured signifiers new and unprecedented meanings — such meanings being no longer binary, as in the past when they were true or false, but now a matter of degree."

...

I could amuse myself, and possibly my readers, by analyzing each word of this wonderful statement, exploring what Ebert thinks he means by 'being', or how a 'meaning', as meaning, could ever have been 'false', to say nothing of his more ridiculous jargonizing. But I will forbear. The man is a joke, a charlatan, a juggler of words, a fire eater of phrases, he is a man behind a curtain yelping at us to 'pay no attention to that man behind the curtain', and any further evisceration of him would be graceless.

But the question of 'contemporary art' is much simpler than Ebert makes it out: 'contemporary artists' are fakes. They understand nothing about Art and care less. What interests them is money and fame. To get at these, they use the massive prestige of Art accumulated over the centuries, thanks to the masters of painting and the other arts. As for Art, they have tossed it aside, and chased out the real artists with marxist inspired slurs such as "garbage of history", "fascist" and "nostalgic copycat". They have stormed and occupied all the institutions upon which Art as a social phenomenon depends. Then, with lies about artists like Marcel Duchamp and word salads such as Ebert concocts, they redefine 'art' as any damn thing, with which they fill their captive galleries and museums, which actually function as money laundering operations for drug lords and other crooks, as well as organs of prestige.

It would be hilarious if it were not dragging uncounted aspiring artists into dead-end lives and depriving the rest of us of important and beautiful parts of the society which, by rights, we should have inherited.

'Contemporary art' and 'contemporary artist' are criminals. John David Ebert is their flatterer, enabler, justifier and priest. He is aiding and abetting a crime against humanity: the destruction of Art and Poetry.



'Queen's Pawn Crowned', 1953, plaster and metal. Aaron Kurzen

Aaron Kurzen (1920–2022) became a 'disciple' of Duchamp in the 1930s, whom he met through the woman he would marry after the war. The latter took him overseas from 1923 to 1945. Kurzen considered himself a surreal-

ist. I became Aaron's student, assistant and 'disciple' in the 1970s. Already, in the 1950s, the use being made of Duchamp was clear to Aaron.



# Afterword

'The Muse Commands', which exists as a screen .pdf file and a lulu.com printed magazine, shows many photos of drawings and paintings by our participants, as well as occasional examples from the masters. These photos are mostly taken with our phones or gleaned from the internet. To say nothing of the problem of cross-platform deformation or the problematic aspects of screens, lulu printing, while amazingly convenient and basically adequate, is approximative and must also cope with cross-platform problems endemic to internet doings.

My point is not that the images in 'The Muse Commands' are therefore amateurish and should be regarded with indulgence but that any such indulgence must be added to a more basic consciousness that photos or images of actual things, including drawings and paintings, should always be treated as no more than reminders or suggestions which reveal only limited aspects of their originals. For, no matter how spectacularly well reproduced, no image of a thing equals that thing.

A drawing or a painting is first of all an object. When we experience that object as an image its objective reality is absent. We are no longer in relation to its actual measures and material qualities, and we are out of any definite situation in which we could actually encounter it (hung on a wall, lit in a certain manner, held in our hands . . . ).

It should be recognized that images can also bring us closer to certain aspects of a painting. Imagine a fresco high on a wall of a dark church. A photograph made on a scaffolding with ad hoc lamps will allow us to see aspects of such a painting impossible to perceive 'in situ'. The 'in situ' perception of that work, however, even if partially impaired, may well — assuming one must choose between them — be more important to its understanding than the image.

My point is not to denigrate images but to bring sobriety to their use. They are useful but we should neither over nor under

estimate their importance. Above all we should not take them as anything other than a more or less partial substitute for their object. This is particularly true of unknown or so called 'original' work. If we have experienced many drawings in real life, and actual Watteau drawings in particular, our imagination can supply much of what is missing from an excellent photographic reproduction of a Watteau. But for much of the work which is and will be featured in 'The Muse Commands', this is more difficult.



The photographs reproduced here, by the nature of the publication — a volunteer and 'amateur' operation taking advantage of digital technologies — are not only, generally speaking, of low quality, they are poorly reproduced whether on screen or via lulu printing.

Understanding this and understanding the limits of images in general, I have no hesitation taking advantage of images and using them in the ways they can legitimately be used.





Rape of Europa, pen and ink, Topias Uusitalo





Vladan Pejanovic

